

Theatre Reviews

Thea Buckley:* *The Taming of the Shrew, Globe to Globe. Dir. Haissam Hussain, 26-27 May 2012.*

An Equal Partnership: Pakistan's Shakespeare, or Transforming the *Shrew*

A discussion of the reception of a Pakistani Shakespeare production in England becomes immediately complicated by the rarity of this occurrence. Any such production by its nature functions as a Polaroid photograph fixing in time several slippery variables, in an instantly emblematic snapshot that may later serve as a defining history. It would be similarly simplistic to let the 2012 Urdu-language London-based production of *The Taming of the Shrew* (or Ilaaj-E-Zid Dastayaab Hai) serve as shorthand for the complicated and colourful topic of Pakistan's Shakespeare and its reception, Anglophone or otherwise.

The topic is perhaps as complicated and colourful as the critical discussion surrounding Shakespeare's problematic rom-com and its controversially misogynistic story. *Shrew* is now widely performed in a more egalitarian, global, politically correct twenty-first century society, one that is largely alienated from the play's skewed gendering and its ambiguous resolution. The Urdu *Shrew*, directed by Haissam Hussain for the Theatre Wallay-Kashf, confronted these temporal, textual, societal, cultural and relational complexities head-on. Future audiences will determine whether the result can be called definitive or pioneering of its genre; for now it is enough to examine the production as a useful sample whereby to gauge its reception by audiences in England. This essay first traces the Urdu adaptation's genesis and performance, and then contextualizes these in a discussion of the issues surrounding its reception.

Bringing the Urdu *Shrew* to the Globe

The Pakistani *Shrew* played at Oxford and London, before touring to Rotherham and Bradford, centres with Urdu-speaking communities. The production detailed here is the first of two performed in London from 25-26 May 2012 at

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Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, a location with historical and cultural associations that might suggest an Anglophone audience. Even if this *Shrew* was performed during the World Shakespeare Festival as well as "Globe to Globe 2012," it was commissioned to highlight the United Kingdom's 2012 Olympics and the accompanying Cultural Olympiad. The UK likewise formed the physical and cultural locus of the world map on the online project A Year of Shakespeare, which documented the WSF productions and situated their host countries. The website was criticized by Alex Huang for its Anglocentric perspective. He complained that the festival was "in large part the London Globe's global Shakespeare" and that the "uses of world maps in this case – informed by a metropolitan bias – reify a sense of British ownership of Shakespeare – both global and English." Despite its indisputably Anglocentric geography, the Globe Theatre has come to represent a physical location for the global celebration of Shakespeare.

At the first Pakistan International Conference on Shakespeare, in 1997, Stanley Wells used the Globe Theatre as a metaphor for global Shakespeare:

This is a symbolically appropriate time for the holding of a conference dedicated to the theme of Shakespeare around the globe. Had I not been speaking here, I should have been taking part in the festivities celebrating the first full season of plays in performance at the newly reconstructed Globe Theatre. (1)

In this way he placed the two occasions and locations on a par. While the Globe had previously hosted visiting foreign productions, 2012 was the first year in which it celebrated these in a Globe to Globe Festival. For *Shrew*'s Pakistani company, including Theatre Wallay head Navid Shahzad, the Globe stage was a global proscenium, as she expressed to Ser Khan:

Pakistan will be participating on a platform which can help promote a liberal view of the country through theatre. ("Localising *Taming of the Shrew*")

Their performance thus represented a chance to showcase Pakistan's cultural prowess before a global audience.

The intent behind the Urdu adaptation was arguably also rooted in its female producers' desire to give the play's women characters an equal, independent portrayal. Shahzad spoke to Sheema Khan of Shakespeare's continuing relevance "in a patriarchal society like ours, where daughters are pushed into relationships" ("When arts and literature mix with one's blood"). Shahzad's collaborator, American academic Susannah Harris-Wilson, explained to Aneeta Madhavan that she selected the play because the Pakistani women she had grown to know well while teaching in Lahore seemed to fit her interpretation of the Elizabethan woman in *Shrew*, who is

able to be on an equal plane with the men who are educated, and finds that she is outstripping a number of men, and thinking for herself, and so no longer the feudal arranged marriage system applies to her. (“*Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu”)

This nuanced portrayal of female independence in Pakistan would be especially useful for an Anglocentric audience whose knowledge of the subject is arguably modelled on only a handful of strong and educated women highlighted by the international media, such as the late politician Benazir Bhutto, or the soft-spoken teenage activist Malala, both of whom were attacked in an attempt to silence them.

Pakistan has for the last few years been consistently listed in the bottom three most dangerous countries worldwide for women on The World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Report, which shows that Pakistan has “both large education gender gaps as well as economic ones” (32). The country, writes Meghan Casserly, is where

cultural, tribal and religious practices harmful to women are frequent. These include acid attacks, forced or underage marriages and punishment by stoning or other physical abuse. (“The Five Most Dangerous Countries to Be a Woman”)

The WEF report data arguably show a correlation between the decline in gender equality and the Taliban’s rise. Gender equality is an issue of especial importance to Pakistan, making the Urdu *Shrew* timely.

An Equal Partnership: Pakistan’s *Shrew* in Performance

Would feminism or patriarchy triumph in this Pakistani interpretation? A discussion of Shakespeare’s *Shrew* inevitably centres on its controversially misogynistic conclusion, wherein Katherine (the “Shrew”) publicly declares her unconditional obedience to her spouse, Petruchio (the “Tamer”). But what happens to the story if the protagonists’ names are instead Kiran and Rustum, and the speech is made in the Urdu language?¹ Would theirs be a “modern” love match of mutual choice, or a “traditional” parental arrangement? Theatre Wallay’s vibrant production soon answered these questions, weaving intercultural threads into a magic carpet, reflecting, challenging, and ultimately soaring above such polarized stereotypes.

¹ Where names can be transliterated or spelt differently, the Globe programme version is preferred here.

First time Shakespeare director Haissam Hussain's version followed *Shrew*'s plot closely. The primary deviation was to reset the play in springtime Pakistan, a setting evoked through costume, music, dance, and Laila Rehman's simple, portable set. Before an expectant Globe audience basking in appropriately warm May temperatures, Anila Rahim's vivid painted canvas of a Lahore street scene formed the stage backdrop. Draped from balcony to floor, this depicted a Basant festival scene with stalls of coloured powders and a rainbow of kites in a cloudless sky. A small star-and-crescent symbol among these elements overtly indicated the production's national origins. Excitement at this sub-continental Shakespeare was palpable in the audience, and one member proudly told me it was a rare production from her homeland.

The pride among those Urdu speakers present was evident when a cheer went up at the word "Urdu," spoken by Salman Shahid. This popular Pakistani veteran TV, film and theatre comic (later an uproariously funny Baptista Minola/MianBasheer) welcomed us in English. He took centre stage in a simple, long-sleeved, cream-and-grey kurta outfit, and introduced the orchestra of six, members of the Sufi rock band Mekaal Hasan directed by Valerie Kaul.² Mixing the modern guitar with the native flute, sitar, dholak (drum) and rubab (lute), they opened with Pakistan's National Anthem, before one band member started the action by crowing comically like a rooster.

The subsequent stumbling entry of Sly/Ravi (Maria Khan) through the delighted crowd signalled a vital plot alteration – instead of a drunken male bumpkin, we would be led through the play by an omniscient shape-shifting Scheherazade (the female storyteller of the *Arabian Nights*, who "tames" her misogynist husband and becomes his queen). Harris-Wilson intended Sly to be "a tier up of loose threads, and a chorus, that makes this partnership between the audience [and performers]" ("*Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu"). Resplendent in a glittering, gold-coin headdress and a mirrored, multicoloured garment, Ravi took on multiple roles as she wove the thread of the story through the play's framework. She danced through and involved the crowd, and appeared to double *Shrew*'s cast of fourteen, becoming alternately beggar/ courtesan/ clotheshorse/ vendor/ clown/ conspirator. Finally, with the help of jacket, beard, and boots, she transformed into Vincentio/ Tajir. This plot device of a shape-shifting narrator neatly reflected the wider transformation in the cast of characters' identities and personalities. In connecting and transforming the onstage and offstage, foreign and familiar, Ravi functioned as a Scheherazade, introducing multiple characters. In evoking Scheherazade, she further fulfilled Sly's framing function, providing a meta-narrative or outer framework for the play's own "spouse-taming" narrative.

² The band's arrangement for Pakistan's National Anthem can be heard here <<http://soundcloud.com/mekaal-hasan-band>>.

This production choice of a female storyteller to drive the narrative action arguably also echoed the producers' emphasis on gender equality: Harris-Wilson stated that Sly was originally supposed to be represented by a *sunderbund* (thread weaver) called Abu Hassan after a male narrator from the *Arabian Nights* ("*Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu"). The same promotion of female independence could be said to be behind the choice of entrusting *Shrew*'s rendering into Urdu to an all-female team of translators: Maryam Pasha, Zaibun Pasha and Aamna Kaul. The translation was praised by those in the know for being "imbued with ironic undertones and good old Pakistani humour" (British Council) while "retaining the essence of original Shakespearian language with imagery, rhythms and meter of the play" (Sahar Iqbal 42). For its non-Urdu, Anglophone audience at an inherent loss to understand and appreciate the language or culture, the production strove to bridge this gap by also relying heavily on physical humour, musical narrative, and visual metaphor to tell Kiran's and Rostum's story.

This theme of transformative female independence was nowhere more overt than in Kiran's evolution, with Rostum's abettance, from bird in a gilded cage to free-flying "falcon" (*Shrew* 4.1.126). This was echoed through the visual metaphor of flight, a theme, visible in the kite backdrop and clearly alluded to in the onstage décor of two ornate birdcages, one with a free bird atop it. For Elizabeth Schafer, these kites worked on multiple levels, evoking the "taming" methods used on both Kate and kites in falconry (259). Kiran's taming, here a transformation, was also reflected in her increasingly free movement to music. She entered sullen, silent and earthbound, casually popping peanuts in the doorway while rolling her eyes at her sister's suitors – side-splittingly portrayed by Ahmed Ali (Tranio/Mir), Osman Khalid Butt (Hortensio/Hasnat), Umer Naru (Lucentio/Qazim) and Mukkarum Kaleem (Gremio/Ghazi). *Shrew*'s heroine later lamented over a kite torn by her spoilt sister Bina (a spitefully simpering Karen David), before becoming the dancing, kite-flying Kiran that Rostum fell in love with at first sight, and then the twirling, newlywed woman of the house. Hoisted onto Rostum's lap during their courtship, his shoulders after the wedding, and a pedestal during her final speech, Kiran's vertical journey on the stage space symbolically mirrored her inner growth. It simultaneously represented her gradual rise in her own estimation as well as that of her society, and this was accompanied, phoenix-like, by flame-gradient-coloured changes of costume between each landmark scene.

Lead actress Nadia Jamil explained her own feelings after the show, when I asked her what first attracted her to the role of Kiran. She animatedly retorted, "Nothing – nothing! I just wanted to kill her at first!" Then her face softened, and she laughed. "But then, she fell in love – when people fall in love, you know, they do crazy, amazing things" (personal communication 27 May 2012). Rostum Khan, this *Shrew*'s hero (a macho, sensitive portrayal by Omair Rana) was clearly also in love. He threatened, but did not follow through, on cuffing Kiran back; a wink and

a sigh accompanied and softened his temporary mirroring of her mistreatment of others. In the Globe's recorded interview, Omair Rana later joked, "I think Rustum's character was more of a shrew, and eventually got tamed by her!" He added, "We presented that point of view, that it's not necessarily a man who is dominating in his misogynistic sense the woman, but becoming equals" ("Interview: International Insights"). Kiran's transformation was visibly abetted by her husband's love, and she evolved from a woman who had once terrified men into one who made her father shed tears of joy.

Rana also highlighted a metaphor of sexual equality that was subtly reflected in the play through the costumes and the weaving motif:

The *Koran* says, 'Your wife is your garment, and you are a garment for them.' And we use the Urdu word for garment, garment is *libaas*... we use that repeatedly, to reflect that. ("Interview: International Insights")

This *Shrew*'s costume changes were metamorphic, running the Lahore gamut from gorgeous to grotesque: curled slippers to plastic sandals, floral shirts to silken shawls. Rana connected this emphasis on garb with what he saw as *Shrew*'s metaphor of inner worth and loving acceptance, reflected in Rustum's mock-déshabillé at the wedding, or as he explained "It doesn't matter what garment you're wearing, it's what you are inside that matters" ("Interview: International Insights"). One Anglophone audience member, Sandra Lawson, picked up on this theme of reciprocity and clothing via the actors' non-verbal communication, observing,

When Petruchio offers Kate his shawl because she is cold, this shared piece of clothing brings them together. It is apparent that this is the moment when she falls in love with her husband, a man who is not of her own choosing. (*The Taming of the Shrew*)

Sexual equality and loving unity was also the focus of the denouement. Kiran's speech in the final scene reflected partnership and was an unforgettably tender team act with Rustum. Linking hands, and taking equal turns atop a low table-pedestal, the couple mimed both the marital quarrels to be avoided and the tenderness to be encouraged. Reviewer Peter Kirwan observed, "This *Shrew* discovered the unity in the speech which perhaps native-language performances have ignored or been unable to find" (*The Taming of the Shrew* (Theatre Wallay) @ Shakespeare's Globe"). In accurately understanding the intentions behind the production's conclusion, Kirwan was vindicated in feeling that "for much of the play a non-Urdu speaker could follow the familiar play line-for-line" (*The Taming of the Shrew* (Theatre Wallay) @ Shakespeare's Globe"). His and Lawson's observations as Anglophone audience members indicate that the Urdu *Shrew* ultimately succeeded in transcending linguistic and cultural differences.

The play concluded with Salman Shahid quoting an Urdu verse by Bulleh Shah. This Sufi philosopher-poet, Rana explained to interviewer Suman Bhuchar, is “the equivalent of Shakespeare that Pakistan had” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”). Behind the verse’s selection was lead actress Jamil, who had first recalled the verse in a dream about rehearsing the play, then convinced the rest of the cast that it should be incorporated at the play’s end. Jamil told Bhuchar that this quote represented the essence of the play’s metaphor about selfless love:

Because to me, that is what this play is about [... the producer] wanted it to be about educated women [...] But the fact is, that you search for [self] knowledge. [...] Bulleh Shah is spot on when he says it’s just about dropping your ego, and learning how to love. (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”)

Rana expanded on this: “It’s the power of unconditional giving. And that is truly empowering for the self” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”). In honouring Jamil’s suggestion, allowing the perspective and work of women from Pakistan and other cultures to be as equally valued as that of the men, the production arguably also fulfilled the vision of Asia-centric critics of intercultural theatre, such as Rustom Bharucha. Bharucha stresses the importance of having “a respect for individual histories;” he advocates using a “method of work that reflects larger principles of exchange”, including the active involvement of the actresses, to avoid the power imbalance inherent in retelling a feminist story if women are directed by men (viii, 6). The production not only achieved this by including the summative Sufi quote, but also further demonstrated that women were very equal partners in the Urdu *Shrew*.

In its peaceful coexistence and joint triumph of the sexes, producer Harris-Wilson’s intention was thus arguably successfully realized in performance, with partnerships acting as catalysts for societal transformation or, as she paraphrases Shakespeare (*Shrew* 5.1.124), “What miracles love hath wrought.” As the cast reunited onstage in a closing dance, the intercultural Globe audience clapped along united in appreciation.

Receiving Pakistan’s *Shrew*: After the Show

If the intentions behind the presentation of the Pakistani *Shrew* were largely successfully realized in performance, the question still remains of the outcome. What was their significance – what was the overall reception? “Reception” is a term presupposing an audience. Yet, the rarity of “Pakistani Shakespeare” makes it, as said earlier, difficult to typify an audience at all for the phenomenon. This situation is further complicated by the historical and situational relationship

of this South Asian production to its British host locations; like the touring production, its audience could be called culturally liminal.

The audience for the 25 May play was visibly evenly divided between those who understood Urdu and who laughed in all the appropriate places, and those who did neither. This was one challenge for a play that was partly meant to bridge a presupposed gap between Pakistani and other cultures. The production was originally sponsored by the British Council, its website states, as part of its “global commitment to arts and intercultural relations.” According to the website, while the adaptation “addressed contemporary issues, particularly that of the role of educated and strong women in a patriarchal society,” it also functioned as a forum for intercultural dialogue.

To some extent, this dialogue between audience members was visible; afterwards, as the site mentions, “British Pakistanis were seen going up to the performers appreciating their brilliant role as cultural ambassadors.” The issue of culture here however becomes murky when trying to determine the precise shades of interculturalism and the ratio of one culture to another. Besides the presence of a diasporic audience of South Asian origin, as equally native to London as the non-Urdu speaking Londoners, there was an added guest audience in the form of an unusually high number of tourists with the Olympic visitors from all over the globe.

In a pre-Olympics Intercultural Symposium hosted at Shakespeare’s Globe, on 19 May 2012, Globe to Globe Festival Director Tom Bird had stated that this diasporic audience was at the forefront of the intentions behind the Festival, which were to “engage the different linguistic and cultural communities of London.” The Pakistani *Shrew*’s target audience was no exception. The Globe website page for the production highlighted the fact that Urdu speakers number *one million* UK speakers. Urdu, Pakistan’s national language is mutually intelligible with Hindi, giving *Shrew* an even wider audience. In 2012 the UK’s foreign-born population numbered 7.7 million, with 2.8 million in London alone; Pakistan and India, both Urdu-speaking countries, were in the top three countries of birth for the migrant population (Rienzo, Vargas-Silva). Much of this *Shrew*’s audience, as reflected in first-person reviews or quotes, was undoubtedly diasporic.

The Urdu Shakespeare production’s rarity heightens its importance in functioning as a forum for intercultural dialogue, for not only its Anglophone and Pakistani-origin Urdu-speaking audiences, still linked by vestiges of post-colonialism, but also among its diasporic South Asian audience. Pakistan originated as a nation after unprecedented human migration and catastrophic violence born of its partition from India to become a separate Islamic Republic. Their relationship has yet to recover from the violence of their being split along artificial boundary lines drawn by the then British government. The Pakistani diaspora remains especially close to its first motherland; Kalra, Kaur and Hutnykstate that while “many diasporic groups can be called ‘deterritorialised’

because their collective claims to an identity do not depend upon residence on a particular plot of land,” yet “the Pakistani diaspora has a much closer and intimate economic and political connection with Pakistan” (32,19). This post-colonial relationship also impacts the emerging identity of Pakistani Shakespeare; the entry for “Pakistan” in the *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* tellingly still contains a single reference: “see India” (336). While Pakistan has its own Shakespeare Association, founded at the University of Karachi in 1997 by Professor Rafat Karim, the scholar’s obituary in Pakistan’s *Dawn* newspaper cited his reputation as “the only person from Pakistan to regularly attend international Shakespeare conferences and seminars around the world” (“Prof Rafat Karim Passes Away”). The Urdu *Shrew* production was therefore especially important in helping to define Pakistan on the international and intercultural Shakespeare map.

The production’s importance as representative of Pakistani culture to its audience thus cannot be overemphasized. Veteran actor Salman Shahid had made light of the Pakistani National Anthem being played at the production’s start, joking, “now these musicians will play [the] national anthem of Pakistan, of course, but don’t worry, it is just the national anthem not a takeover!” (Azlan). The joke not only broke the ice but also functioned to excuse the fact that the playing of national anthems was technically outside the official Festival guidelines for visiting companies. Bird told us on 19 May that he had already noted that a sense of nationalism was ever-present in the Festival, despite the organizers actively working against it, including making an official request to dispense with overt representations such as flags, anthems or passports. “Hearing Urdu on an English stage is a thrill in itself,” diasporic audience member Nosheen Iqbal wrote of her experience at the Bradford production (“*The Taming of the Shrew* – review”). For Pakistan, such a representation was clearly too important to omit.

When the anthem began, as is often done before a Pakistani theatre performance, the audience stood up en masse. Backstage, the cast attended as well: “For all of us, it’s a very emotional moment backstage,” Nadia Jamil proudly told Bhuchar (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”). Kirwan, in the audience for the 26 May performance, was impressed by this cultural ambassadorship. He wrote that the overt nationalism lent the production poignancy and agency:

For the first time that I’ve seen in a Globe to Globe production, a member of the company came onto the stage to introduce the play and the company’s honour at being here, before asking the musicians to play the Pakistani national anthem [...] The joy and pride apparently felt by the company in being at the Globe translated into a confident, hysterical and moving performance, offering one of the finest *Shrew* [productions] I’ve yet seen. (“*The Taming of the Shrew* (Theatre Wallay) @ Shakespeare’s Globe”)

The Urdu-speaking audience likewise received the production with open arms. Shakespeare thus became a vehicle for the transmission of Pakistani cultural pride.

Lead actors Rana and Jamil spoke passionately behind the scenes about the importance of the Globe performance as a platform to promote a more accurate global representation of Pakistani culture. With the Urdu *Shrew*, “We could show that there was also a *human* face to Pakistan,” Rana told Bhuchar, “We’re a passionate people, we’re loud, and we love food in Lahore ... so we use those elements” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”). He stressed the importance of countering the negative stereotypes of Pakistan as often portrayed in the international media, and through this, of “empowering people who are associated with the Urdu language and Pakistan, hopefully, to raise their chins high and be proud” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”). In the UK, this issue is especially relevant; immigration is such a sensitive political and social topic that the term “Paki,” once merely slang for “Pakistani,” has become an insulting reference to any immigrant of South Asian racial origin. Jamil also criticized the first world media’s narrow stereotyping of a bearded Pakistani man as the face of radical Islam: “Why can’t you show an intelligent beard?” she asked wryly. “My dad has a beard, and he has a brain as well!” Rana added drolly, “Well, I’m donning a beard, and I’m on stage at the Globe!” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”). The joke made the more serious point that he was publicly protesting and dispelling a cultural stereotype via Shakespearean theatre and its most famous public platform.

In addition to dispelling negative stereotypes, and fostering Pakistani audience pride, the production’s cast further aspired to use Shakespeare as a catalyst for Pakistani self-affirmation at home. Jamil declared to Bhuchar, “Pakistanis—all over the world and in Pakistan also—need more things to identify with which they can hold their heads up and say yes, that is us!” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe”). This positive representation of Pakistani culture was well received in Bradford, where British Pakistani reviewer Nosheen Iqbal described her pride at the unique production,

I can’t remember the last time I saw a portrayal of Pakistanis that didn’t involve bomb making and obsessive praying. Nor have I ever heard the Pakistani National Anthem performed in Britain. (“*The Taming of the Shrew* – review”)

According to her Pakistan-born mother, even more than representing Shakespeare, the play represented a precious bit of Pakistan in England, “It was like a scented breeze from my motherland” (“*The Taming of the Shrew* – review”).

For other audience members, the Urdu language adaptation meant that much was missed. The Anglophone audience was aided by a working knowledge of the story and the Globe’s rudimentary summative surtitles that scrolled across

digital screens on either side of the stage. However, these held confusingly different variants of the lead characters' names – “Kiran” alternated with Katherine's transliterated Pakistani appellation “Qurat-Ul-Aine” (“power of the eyes”). It was not only difficult to catch the subtleties of the language, it was also difficult to interpret cultural nuances. Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper reported that the adaptation “represented characters from Pakistan's four provinces and good naturedly poked fun at ethnic archetypes” (“Theatre Review: Shakespeare at the Globe – In Urdu”). Rana later identified these four to Bhachar as “the Pashtun, the Sindhi, the Punjabi, the Urdu.” At the time, however, the fact that Rustum and Kiran came from different areas in Pakistan, heightening their differences, was lost on an audience unfamiliar with the cultural subtext. Much of the humour interlaced with these regional stereotypes went over our head, and any accompanying connotations were lost on those ignorant of these Pakistani subcultures.

Despite our ignorance of such subtleties, the approach taken by the actors – using exaggerated gestures and facial expressions – was very successful in communicating the rich world of Pakistani humour, with its comic timing and physical comedy. It became quickly apparent that standard theatre slapstick such as a trip roll or a fart joke translates instantly into universal audience appreciation across all cultural barriers. Rana described the attention and affection he felt from the crowd,

It was literally coming home. They were so receptive, and forgiving, and loving, and the *details* that they caught onto, it's something that we in theatre are not used to. (“Interview: International Insights”)

The audience members also interacted with each other, with the Urdu-speaking audience enjoying sharing their understanding with their guests, effectively on inverted home territory. Reviewer Matt Wolf wrote that Bulleh Shah and his concluding quote were explained to him by “the very kind Pakistani medic who was seated next to me with her family, all of whom loved every minute of the show” (“Shakespeare's study in domestic discord played brightly and for laughs”). Lawson also noted the bonhomie and the easy accessibility of this humorous approach to *Shrew*:

This production is played heavily for laughs and even though I was in the minority, and surrounded by Pakistani audience members, many of the jokes were easy to understand. (“*The Taming of the Shrew*”)

An often overlooked reason some of these jokes were so easy to understand, is that the production also occasionally bridged the “cultural divide” through using a shared vocabulary. In doing so, it subverted another of the Globe to Globe's

golden rules, as Bird had stated to us: “No English.” The visiting companies had been urged to perform not adaptations, but purely translations into their own language. Rather than artificially purging English loan words from their translation, *Shrew*’s translators created Urdu dialogues with a realistic everyday sprinkling of English vocabulary. These bits were especially effective in scenes that mocked the present-day immigration issue with its coveted green card lottery. For example, in vying for Bianca/ Bina’s hand by proclaiming their ever-greater eligibility, one suitor impressively declared that he had a “five year entry visa,” whereupon he was promptly outdone by his rival, who brought the house down by flourishing the ultimate trump card, “British passport!” The joke clearly struck a chord with the entire audience, on multiple levels of humour.

Comic Pakistani Shakespeare has a precedent. In 1997, Pakistan hosted a visiting Royal Shakespeare Company production, Tim Supple’s *Comedy of Errors*, co-sponsored by the British Council. Reviewer Michael Church wrote that Supple had voiced his concern that the play’s gender politics might have “an incendiary effect” on Pakistani audiences, in particular the debate between Adriana and Luciana, with “one asking why her husband should enjoy rights which were denied her, the other replying that that was simply the way of the world” (“All around the world in stages”). Church feared this concern was particularly applicable to the venue where he caught up with the touring show, Lahore, “a city made famous this year through the case of Saima Waheed, whose father had imprisoned her for daring to marry the man she loved, rather than the man he had chosen for her” (“All around the world in stages”). However, Church soon found that these assumptions of a Pakistani theatre audience were unfounded: “The theatre did not break up in disorder: the evening was of a very different stamp” (“All around the world in stages”). The Lahore audience, he found, not only

missed surprisingly little in the [English] text but was relaxed enough over the gender tensions to enjoy the comic moments, especially the physical slapstick. (“All around the world in stages”)

Schafer similarly felt that humour was the overall central thread of the 2012 Urdu *Shrew*. She posited that the opening Pakistani takeover joke set the tone for the entire production:

big issues were in circulation in terms of gender and international stereotyping, but the production consistently asked the audience to choose laughter. (256)

Amidst the humour, the serious moments were not lost on the attentive intercultural audience. Underlying the passport joke was arguably producer Harris-Wilson’s belief that an equal marriage is still difficult for Pakistani women:

educated Pakistani women are finding it more difficult to find appropriate partners in their home country. Many of them leave for the UK and the USA to find men who will appreciate and encourage their intelligence and modernity as equal partners. (*Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu)

Jamil echoed this perception, telling Bhuchar that Kiran's father as a "broad-minded" man who has "educated his daughters [yet is typically only] obsessed with [their] marriage" (*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe). Rana added that he felt that the play reflected Pakistani patriarchy with "the dowry culture" and "the father wanting to wed off the elder [daughter] before the younger" (*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe). While *Shrew's* audience was overwhelmingly positive in its reception of Kiran's concluding speech on marriage, Lawson expressed her disappointment. She posited that, in trying to stay true to its culture, the production actually restricted its options and thus suffered. She claimed:

Although this is an enjoyable and entertaining version of Shakespeare's play, it wants to conform to the restrictions of Pakistani society. In this production it is not necessary to tame Kate into submission because society would dictate that she must obey her father and not stray very far from his command. (*The Taming of the Shrew*)

Lawson thus pinpointed the fact that the love story of Kiran and Rustam, while portraying gender equality in theory, was still unequally representative of practice in the context of its cultural reality.

Pakistanis' continuing struggles for social and sexual equality both in the UK and overseas are widely highlighted in the international media. Schafer mentioned one case in her review:

One of the main news stories in the British press at the time was feeding the worst British stereotypes about Pakistani culture: the trial of the parents of Shafiea Ahmed (1986-2003), accused of murdering their daughter because she refused an arranged marriage, can read as a brutal taming narrative. (258)

Stereotypes aside, Pakistani women have been consistently disempowered, in a society which is still firmly patriarchal. This gender gap is illustrated by Kamila Shamsie in a fictional story, where she compares stereotypical Pakistani versus typical Anglophone receptions of Shakespeare, in order to highlight issues such as the vastly differing cultural perception of women's rights. In the story, Shamsie has just come back to Pakistan from studying in England, and she recounts *Measure for Measure* to her household staff. In doing so, she finds that she has to gradually alter the Shakespearean narrative to fit her audience's differing cultural perceptions on what constitutes topics such as political

corruption, religious piety and gender equality. One of the more telling moments in Shamsie's short story occurs when Ama, the ayah, imagines the orphaned Isabella as entirely helpless without a man,

Without any male relatives, how will she survive? Who will find a husband for her? Who will protect her honour? What will her life then be worth? However base a man Claudio might be, he is still her brother, and his very presence in her world will give her some degree of security. (138)

Such security is especially vital to the women of Pakistan.

The sober issues highlighted by the Urdu *Shrew* included not only the importance of gender equality but also that of preserving and sustaining Pakistan's cultural heritage amidst the pressures of globalization. Jamil stressed the key role of the show's music,

there was also a very strong element of classical music, which I wish more Pakistanis would also tune into, because it is our heritage, it is our culture, and we are letting it die out. (*The Taming of the Shrew* in Urdu at the Globe)

Another vital cultural element that was depicted onstage was Pakistan's Basant festival. Elements of this famous national festival of springtime kite-flying were pervasive throughout the adaptation, reflected in the painted set backdrop, echoed in the coloured costumes, and reproduced in the onstage action. The Basant festival functioned as a framework for the metaphors of flight, freedom, and regeneration. Yet the festival itself was ironically perpetuated in vibrant life only in an overseas stage representation of its cultural centre of Lahore, a year or so after its real-life ban at home by government order. When it abandoned the festival framework, the Urdu *Shrew* production suffered, remarked the *Dawn* reviewer, and hinted at the real-life implications this brought,

The one incongruous moment in the play was when the director chose to indicate the dawning of a new day with the off-stage recitation of the Fajr prayer. [...] The audience's mood became somber as the scene did not ring with the colour, humour and joy of the rest of the play. In an otherwise thoroughly enjoyable evening, this scene was the one painful reminder of the vibrant cultural heritage that Pakistanis are fast suppressing in favour of an overbearing religious identity. (*Theatre Review: Shakespeare at the Globe – In Urdu*)

Basant has been officially banned in Pakistan for the last few years on grounds of health and safety, due to reported past incidents of injured celebrants whose kites had come into contact with live electric wires. The timeline of the Pakistan government ban, however, also coincides with the increasing socio-political pressure from changing religious norms.

The festival is a secular, seasonal one that marks the Punjabi New Year and the advent of spring. “Basant was celebrated by all communities including Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in the pre-partition India,” writes Sehyr Mirza, adding, “However, the orthodox elements in Pakistan have always labelled it as un-Islamic” (“Is Basant a thing of the past?”). Arshad Alam reports that “In Pakistan, fanatic Muslim groups had publicly threatened people against celebrating Basant.” He maintains that

Reclaiming Basant as a space for cultural hybridity was a political act which challenged the insular understanding of dominant Islam which was increasingly getting de-culturalized. (“Basant in Pakistan: Another Politics is Possible”)

In light of the importance of Basant as an outlet for celebrating communal harmony and cultural hybridity, this Globe performance was arguably intended further as a public platform for creative subversion, one where Pakistanis could freely revive and celebrate their cultural heritage and invite the rest of the globe to join in the revelry.

In Conclusion: Celebrating Love and Partnership

The Urdu *Shrew*, celebrating both Basant and Shakespeare during the Cultural Olympiad, was an intercultural success on multiple levels. Audience member Wolf happily concluded that

One not only sees Shakespeare refracted through the broadest cultural prism imaginable, but it’s more than possible to leave the auditorium having made new friends. (“Shakespeare’s study in domestic discord played brightly and for laughs”)

The Globe to Globe performances were further made available to the world outside the auditorium, being posted for several months as full length recordings, via the UK Arts Council sponsored online archive *The Space*. One suspects that the next *Oxford Companion* will include an independent entry for Pakistan, perhaps complete with a colour photo of the production’s Globe to Globe Festival Basant backdrop. Meanwhile, the vibrant performance of the Urdu *Shrew* could be said to have reached a truly global audience, starting at home, a home defined not merely by the occupants’ passports but even more by the presence of shared love and laughter.

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