

EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF PAKISTANI CULTURE IN INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH POETRY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS THROUGH CEFR

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Abstract

This paper critically reviews the portrayal of the Pakistani culture in the English poems prescribed in the intermediate level (Grade XI) and assesses whether the portrayal is aligned to communicative, intercultural, and mediation competences that are related to the B1-B2 band of the CEFR. The qualitative content analysis was done on all 20 poems in the nationally prescribing Book 3 coded in three dimensions: (i) cultural representation (religion, nationalism, gender, labour, class, spirituality, resistance); (ii) communicative and interpretive demands aligned to CEFR expectations; and (iii) positioning of the learner in the poem (what kind of citizen, moral subject, or social actor does the given poem imagine her/him?). Results reveal that the syllabus creates two parallel cultural worlds of experience, institutional order, which lie in British / Euro-modern world and Pakistani/ South Asian, Muslim, and Sufi worlds of moral experience. Imported poems make students appear as ethical spectators of foreign culture, whereas domestically-produced ones make them appear as morally responsible members of the Pakistani community. The paper suggests that poetry within an intermediate English course is an identity-creating tool and that those mediation skills, as per CEFR, have been most effectively triggered when students describe their own world.

Keywords: English curriculum; Pakistani culture; poetry; CEFR; mediation; ideology; citizenship; identity construction.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, teaching English language cannot exist outside of power, identity, and access. English is a source of colonial legacy, status symbol, and an avenue of mobility, especially in higher education, state job, and career (Mansoor, 2005; Rahman, 1996; Siddiqui, 2013). At the middle level (Grades XI-XII), it is not taught as a neutral code but as a social project, which results in the creation of a type of Pakistani subject: literate, patriotic, morally aligned, and disciplined. The ideological regulation of the textbook design (Apple, 2014; Siddiqui, 2013) is a source of civic messaging that is limited to the ability of learners to negotiate meaning in classrooms (Bhatti, Abbas, and Rana, 2021). Narratives of Islamic morality, sacrifice, patriotism, gender roles, obedience, and state loyalty are inculcated in English textbooks as attributes of the good citizen, and centralized reforms, such as the Single National Curriculum, combine religion and nationalism to create the meaning of Pakistani identity (Hussain, Sandaran, and Saeed, 2023; Qazi, 2023; Zaheer, Waheed, and Malik, 2025). The poetry of these textbooks is not an aesthetic game but a moral game, and it is customary to resort to figures such as Iqbal to place sacrifice, honor, and belonging in a collective in the role of moral duty (Siddiqui, 2013). Meanwhile, the syllabus establishes some sort of a stratified cultural space: the local religious-national voices are placed next to imported Romantic, Victorian, or modernist poetry based on European history, secular morality, and individualist worldviews, and both purport to be part of the same moral order

(Cortazzi and Jin, 1999; Kramsch 1993; Hussain, Sandaran, and Saeed, 2023; Apple, 2014; Zaheer, Waheed, and

This raises two questions. To begin with, does these poems uphold the types of communicative and intercultural proficiencies required of the B1-B2 level of Common European Framework of Reference to Languages (CEFR)? The CEFR, particularly in its 2020 Companion Volume redefines competence as action-oriented and socially situated with a focus on mediation, plurilingual/pluricultural awareness, understanding of embedded meanings, and the ability to explain views across cultural frames (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo, 2020; Byram, 1997). This perspective sees culture as not something that can be memorized but negotiated (Council of Europe, 2020; Kantarcioglu, 2022). Second, is the poetry addressing the needs of actual Pakistani learners with their differences by province, gendered experience, disciplinary track, and learning style (Bhatti, Abas, and Rana, 2020; Bhatti, Parveen, and Ali, 2017) National changes bring more and more official versions of what is meant by Pakistani culture, which threatens to wipe out classroom diversity and agency (Zaheer, Waheed, and Malik, 2025). Here, the current research accomplishes two tasks: (1) it critically examines the way in which the Pakistani culture is encoded in the poems included in the intermediate syllabus, particularly, how religion, nationalism, social roles, and civic virtue are constituted; and (2) it assesses whether the said poems address the requirements of B1-B2 levels of communicative, intercultural, and mediation competences as defined by CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Kantarcioglu, This study suggests that high stakes cultural work is being carried out by poetry at the intermediate level on the syllabus through the connection of textbook discourse analysis (Apple, 2014; Hussain, Sandaran, and Saeed, 2023; Zaheer, Waheed, and Malik, 2025) and classroom realities in Pakistan (Bhatti, Abas, and Rana, 2020; Bhatti, Iqbal, and Abbas, 2021). Not only ought it to sound patriotic or moral, but it ought to assist learners to think, speak, negotiate, and criticize like users of English in Pakistan still with only one eye on the world.

1.1. Research Questions

- How is “Pakistani culture” thematically constructed in the English poetry prescribed at the intermediate level (Grades XI) in Pakistan — for example, in terms of religion, nationalism, moral values, gender roles, civic duty, and social hierarchy?
- To what extent do these poems align with CEFR B1–B2 descriptors in terms of linguistic range, sociolinguistic appropriateness, pragmatic competence, and mediation / pluricultural competence?
- What kind of English-using subject (citizen, believer, patriot, moral agent, etc.) is imagined for the learner through this combination of cultural representation and CEFR-relevant communicative demands?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English in Pakistan is not merely a language of communication, but it is a language of legitimacy, influence and access. As an aspirational resource, English is said to offer accessibility to higher education, state institutions and mobility between classes (Mansoor, 2005; Rahman, 1996). English is not only taught in grammar and understanding but is a vehicle of social identity and national ideology in the state-controlled classrooms, implying that the decision of the curriculum is impossible to make without the political agenda (Apple, 2014; Canagarajah, 1999). The study of Pakistani ELT demonstrates that, in English classrooms, national belonging is defined at the moral level, and it is frequently determined by the ideals of loyalty to the state, subordination to religion, and compliance with authority as a civic virtue (Hussain, Sandaran, and Saeed, 2023;

Qazi, 2023; Jan et al., 2023). It is supported by the pedagogy that favors delivery over dialogue and limits student agency and makes them disciplined national subjects instead of meaning negotiators (Bhatti, Iqbal, and Abbas, 2021; Bhatti, Abas, and Rana, 2020). In this ideological economy, poetry in the post-secondary level is seldom understood as a free aesthetic experience, but it is often framed as a moral lesson: faith, sacrifice, loyalty, obedience, etc., and employed to legitimize who is entitled to speak as Pakistan, and on what moral basis (Hussain et al., 2023; Qazi, 2023; Rahman, 1996; Shah, 2023; Jan et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, the current global efforts in language education (in particular, in the framework of the CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo and North, 2020) do not change the expectations on the B1-B2 level; specifically, rote textual understanding is replaced by mediation, pluricultural competence, and the capacity to interpret, explain, and reframe culturally situated meanings. The CEFR now addresses learners as social actors who are able to salvage implicit meaning, deal with sensitive cultural texts and communicate among worldviews (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo and North, 2020), which reflects the argument of Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1993) that learners of language need to be intercultural mediators instead of passive reproducers. This directly applies to the context of Pakistan, in which intermediate English students are introduced to ideologically charged poetic readings at the entrance to the university and professional life, yet in which the classroom activities remain mostly teacher-centered, textbook-focused, and exam-driven, and any form of interpretive negotiation or intercultural conversation is not given much room (Bhatti et al., 2020; Bhatti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). The conflict between these CEFR informed communicative goals and local delivery practices becomes really sharp when we consider such a heavy ideologically charged field as poetry.

Although much has been done on ideology in Pakistani textbooks and about CEFR-oriented pedagogy in other countries, an important gap in the empirical literature still exists. The works, like Hussain et al. (2023) demonstrate that English textbooks stimulate a strictly governed national-religious identity but mainly focus on prose and thematic units, yet not poetry as a specific curricular tool. Qazi (2023) and Jan et al. (2023) follow the process of moralizing and Islamizing citizenship in official sources, but address macro-discourse, without considering how B1-B2 learners are supposed to decode, decode, and mediate the discourse in English. Bhatti and co-authors (2020, 2021) study the styles of Pakistani learners and classroom situations but do not determine whether the poetry program correlates with the CEFR levels of the sociolinguistic range, pragmatic competence, and mediation. Meanwhile, the literature of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo and North, 2020) describes what the intermediate learners are supposed to be capable of doing with ideologically and national-culturally embedded texts, yet it has not been applied to Pakistani intermediate poetry in a systematic manner, which is still performing ideological and national work (Hussain et al., 2023; Shah, 2023). This research paper fills that gap by connecting those strands: it does not only examine the representation of the Pakistani culture in the recommended poems, but also assesses whether the poems develop the type of intercultural, interpretive agency of which the CEFR is capable - or whether they merely recreates a national script.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research design of the present study is a qualitative content analysis, which aims at analysing the portrayal of the Pakistani culture in the English poetry text which is prescribed in the English language at the intermediate (Grade XI) level, as well as assessing the representation against the CEFR-based communicative and intercultural competence requirements. It is the qualitative content analysis that should be used when the aim is to describe textual content and at the same

time to interpret the ideological, sociocultural, and pedagogical work that the texts are performing (Apple, 2014; Byram, 1997; Canagarajah, 1999). In this case, poetry is approached as a part of curricular speech: a consciously chosen element of state-associated English curriculum that predetermines how students see themselves, their country and their communicative obligations. The research starts with the premise that English education in Pakistan can never be culturally neutral and that textbooks communicate specific ideals of identity, morality, and citizenship and that there are expectations of obedience, patriotism and religiosity (Hussain, Sandaran, and Saeed, 2023; Qazi, 2023; Rahman, 1996). In this paper, this issue is specifically applied to the field of poetry and connected with the CEFR, which focuses on the mediation, intercultural awareness, and pragmatic competence on the B1-B2 level (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo and North, 2020).

3.1. Corpus / Data Selection

The dataset consists of all 20 poems in “Book 3,” a prescribed English textbook at the Grade XI level. It considers both (i) poems rooted in Pakistani/South Asian traditions (e.g., Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sachal Sarmast, Bulleh Shah, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, and context-specific texts like “A Sindhi Woman”) and (ii) poems from British and Euro-American canons (e.g., W. H. Auden, A. E. Housman, W. H. Davies, T. S. Eliot, Percy Bysshe Shelley). Taking the full set as a unit allows comparison of how “the learner,” “the nation,” and “morality” are constructed across local and imported voices, rather than assuming the book speaks with a single cultural position.

3.2. Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided by three research questions:

1. How is “Pakistani culture” thematically constructed in the selected poems (e.g., nationalism, religion, gender, labour, class, resistance, spirituality, dignity, belonging)?
2. To what extent do these poems align with CEFR B1–B2 descriptors in terms of linguistic demand, sociocultural/pragmatic demand, and mediation/pluricultural competence?
3. What subject position is offered to the learner — what kind of English-using self (citizen, believer, dissenter, subordinate, moral agent, etc.) is imagined and invited?

To answer these, each poem was coded along three dimensions:

(a) Cultural Representation Dimension (RQ1).

For each poem we coded: (i) cultural world / setting (Karachi slums, British industrial space, Punjabi Sufi milieu, English pastoral spring, etc.); (ii) dominant themes (patriotism, obedience to God, class inequality, mortality, resistance); (iii) moral / ideological messaging (e.g., “serve the nation,” “love is universal,” “reject clerical authority,” “honour working-class women”); (iv) visibility of gender and power (female labour, hierarchy, obedience); and (v) explicit local markers (Pakistan, Sindh, Punjabi Sufi discourse, Islamic moral vocabulary, postcolonial struggle). This distinguishes poems that center Pakistani/South Asian moral and social vocabularies from those that normalize external (often British or Euro-modern) worlds.

(b) CEFR Communicative / Interpretive Demand Dimension (RQ2).

Each of our poems was coded according to the following: (i) linguistic load (lexical density, abstraction, archaic diction); (ii) pragmatic/interpretive demand (what must be inferred: irony, political critique, spiritual logic); (iii) the sociocultural / intercultural demand (what background is assumed Karachi labour economies, Sufi cosmology, British civic institutions, Christian time); (iv) the nearest CEFR B1-B2 competence target (e.g., explain an ideological stance, moderate culturally embedded spiritual This indicates the change of

CEFR to mediation, pluricultural competence, and pragmatic depth as opposed to grammar only (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021). It also determines whether the syllabus allows learners to describe their own sociocultural world using English which is a fundamental CEFR objective.

(c) Learner Positioning Dimension (RQ3).

For each poem we coded: (i) implied addressee (youth, “my nation,” grieving companion, observer of British order, etc.); (ii) expected learner role (passive admirer of a moral script vs active critic / responsible agent); and (iii) offered identity model (spiritually accountable believer, anti-colonial Muslim youth, witness to Karachi’s working-class women, loyal admirer of national institutions). This reveals whether the learner is positioned as an internal moral-political actor in Pakistani society or as an external observer of someone else’s world.

3.3. Coding Procedure

Coding followed two stages.

Stage 1: Descriptive coding. For each poem (supported by textbook notes, guiding questions, and summaries in Book 3), we extracted core elements: setting (“Karachi slum”), key social figure (“Sindhi woman carrying water”), and implied lesson (“her dignity challenges the narrator’s complacency”). Local poems (e.g., Iqbal, Faiz, Qasmi, Bulleh Shah, Sachal Sarmast, Rumi) and imported poems (e.g., Auden, Housman, Shelley) were handled in the same way.

Stage 2: Analytical coding. These descriptive summaries were then mapped onto the three dimensions above (cultural representation, CEFR communicative/interpretive demand, learner positioning). From there, structured comparative tables were produced to show, side by side, how each poem operates culturally, pedagogically, and ideologically. Because the study is interpretive, not statistical, no inter-rater reliability coefficients were calculated. Consistency was maintained by repeatedly applying the same guiding prompts (“Who is addressed?” “Whose world is normalized?” “What CEFR task is implied here?”) to every poem. This ensured comparability across the full dataset.

3.4. Ethical and Positional Considerations

Only published curricular material is analyzed in the study. There was no classroom observation, audio/video, or data collected regarding students. Ethical considerations hence relate to interpretation and not human subjects protection. The approach to reading is purposefully critical, since the poems and their contextualization involve the issues of religion, nationalism, gender, labour, obedience, and state loyalty that, as it has already been demonstrated, are ideologically biased in the context of Pakistani English sources (Hussain et al., 2023; Qazi, 2023; Rahman, 1996). It is noted in the study, too, that Pakistani culture is plural internally and contested: Iqbal, Faiz, Sachal Sarmast, and Bulleh Shah are the representatives of various moral universes: anti-colonial uplift, socialist-inflicted resistance, Sindhi Sufi annihilation of ego, Punjab defiance of clerical authority, which are not necessarily consistent with each other. To make them deal collectively as a Pakistani is an analytical gesture that seeks to demonstrate scope, rather than enforce uniformity. Lastly, however, CEFR does not serve as a statement that the Pakistani classrooms are currently CEFR-oriented. The involved question is pedagogical: Do these poems provide learners with the possibility to mediate and interpret at B1-B2 level and interpret against another culture or are they in the first place the will-rewarded loyalty (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021)?

3.5. Methodological Contribution

This research paper has two methodological contributions. First, it considers poetry (which is usually marginalized as either an ethical instruction or an aesthetic decorum) as an important location where English undertakes ideological labor in Pakistani education. Previous studies on ELT in Pakistan are biased towards prose texts, lessons based on civics and policy discourse; in this case poetry is read as the bearer of national identity, gendered labour, spirituality, dissent and obedience. Second, combining local politiciosity of the curricula with global discourse on communicative competence, the study connects with local curricular politics and global discourse through poem-level discourse analysis and CEFR-informed concepts of mediation and positioning of the learner. This generates a useful evaluative frame: does the teaching of English based on poetry help learners to tell themselves - culturally, spiritually, politically - in English or continue to teach students primarily to admire, translate, and internalize the world of another (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo and North, 2020)?

4. RESULTS

Table 1

Cultural Representation in the Prescribed Poems

#	Poem / Poet	Cultural World	Dominant Themes	Moral / Ideological Messaging	Gender / Power Visibility	Local Markers
1	The Rain/ W. H. Davies	Nature scene with social metaphor; broadly Western pastoral	Class inequality, charity, moral interdependence	The “rich leaves” give water to the “poor leaves,” implying ethical redistribution and social compassion	Power framed as economic hierarchy; gender not foregrounded	None (no Pakistan named)
2	Night Mail — W. H. Auden	Industrial Britain: postal train crossing borders, moorland, towns	Public service, duty, social cohesion	National infrastructure serves everyone (“letters for the rich... the poor”), celebrating organized civic delivery	Workers shown as serving the nation; gender is traditional (wives, children waiting at home)	None
3	Loveliest of Trees — A. E. Housman	English woodland in Easter bloom	Beauty, mortality, brevity of life	Life is short; one must value beauty before death	No direct gender critique; self-reflection of (male) lyrical voice	None
4	O Where Are You Going? — W. H. Auden	Unspecified rural/gothic space with looming danger	Fear vs courage; independence vs social control	The cautious voice tries to stop the traveler; the traveler insists on going, valorizing resolve and self-determination	Power tension between those who warn/control and the one who resists	None

#	Poem / Poet	Cultural World	Dominant Themes	Moral / Ideological Messaging	Gender / Power Visibility	Local Markers
5	In the Street of the Fruit Stalls — Jan (Jon) Stallworthy	Postcolonial South Asian bazaar / night market (melons, guava, lanterns)	Poverty, tenderness, sensory richness of urban street life	Even in scarcity, there is wonder, color, and desire; dignity of ordinary people and children in a market economy	Focus on “dark children,” poverty, and vulnerability; implicit class power imbalance	South Asian street commerce imagery, tropical fruits
6	A Sindhi Woman — Jan (Jon) Stallworthy	Karachi slums / Sindh urban periphery	Female labour, grace, resilience amid poverty	Working-class woman’s dignity is morally instructive to the (likely educated/male) observer	Centers a poor woman as strong, balanced, beautiful in motion; critiques passive/idealized femininity	Explicitly Pakistani: “Karachi slums,” “Sindhi” identity
7	Times (Ecclesiastes 3:1–12)	Scriptural / Abrahamic worldview	Cycles of life: birth/death, weeping/dancing, war/peace	Human life is governed by divinely ordered seasons; acceptance of temporality	Gender largely neutral; authority framed as sacred order	Indirectly familiar to Muslim-majority learners via shared prophetic tradition, but not Pakistan-specific
8	Ozymandias — Percy Bysshe Shelley	Ancient/ruined imperial desert	Fragility of power, arrogance of rulers, decay	All empires fall; pride and tyranny are temporary	Power is explicitly political (the tyrant-king); gender is not thematic	None
9	The Feed — Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi	Local South Asian / Pakistani everyday nature (sparrow feeding chicks)	Maternal sacrifice, scarcity, survival	The moral weight of motherhood under resource scarcity; injustice of hunger	Strong gendered care figure (mother sparrow struggling to feed many young); class/maternal burden metaphor	Local (Pakistani) poet; class/misery read as Pakistani social reality
10	The Hollow Men — T. S. Eliot	Modernist wasteland / spiritual desolation	Moral paralysis, alienation, spiritual emptiness	Warning that society has become spiritually hollow and ethically inert	Collective “we” is spiritually emasculated/impotent; powerlessness is shared	None
11	Leisure — W. H. Davies	Pastoral / nature; could be universalized but textually English countryside	Overwork, stress, loss of wonder	Modern life is spiritually damaging if it erases time for	Gender not focal; critique is socioeconomic/industrial	None

#	Poem / Poet	Cultural World	Dominant Themes	Moral / Ideological Messaging	Gender / Power Visibility	Local Markers
				reflection and beauty		
12	Ruba'iyat — Allama Muhammad Iqbal	Indo-Muslim / South Asian anti-colonial intellectual world	Khudi (selfhood), faith, revival, dignity of the Muslim community	Youth must cultivate inner strength, spiritual clarity, and national responsibility; Europe is critiqued as soulless	Addresses “you” (often implicitly youth) as agent of destiny; empowerment discourse, not passive obedience	Explicitly Muslim identity, anti-colonial pride, national awakening
13	A Tale of Two Cities — John Peter	War-torn / devastated landscape (post-conflict imagery)	Violence, human suffering, helplessness	War destroys ordinary lives; civilians are powerless and traumatized	Civilian bodies are injured, afraid; critique of structural violence, but gender not central	No direct Pakistani naming, but post-war ruin resonates with global South / postcolonial trauma
14	My Neighbour Friend Breathing His Last! — Bulleh Shah	Punjabi / Sufi environment; intimate moment of death and grief	Mortality, spiritual transition, love and loss	Death is imminent; attachment to the beloved friend/soul creates existential and spiritual crisis	Emotional voice expresses desperate attachment; challenges silent, “masculine” stoicism	Punjabi Sufi worldview; local idiom of intimacy with the “beloved”
15	He Came to Know Himself — Sachal Sarmast	Sufi Sindh / Indus Valley devotional tradition	Divine love, self-annihilation in God, martyrdom (Mansur, etc.)	Spiritual truth requires surrendering ego, enduring suffering, transcending identity labels	Undermines clerical / institutional authority; emphasizes personal spiritual journey over social hierarchy	Sindhi Sufi lens; direct rootedness in Sindh’s mystical tradition
16	God’s Attributes — Jalaluddin Rumi	Classical Persian-Islamic moral universe	Ethics, God-consciousness, moral self-regulation	God’s Names (“Seeing,” “Hearing,” “Knowing”) exist to discipline the believer’s behavior and conscience	Power is divine; humans (men/women equally) are accountable moral actors	Islamic moral vocabulary familiar to Pakistani learners
17	The Delight Song — N. Scott Momaday	Indigenous identity (Native American), unity between human and nature	Self-affirmation, cosmological belonging, sacred relation with nature	The “I am...” anaphora asserts dignity and interconnectedness	Speaker self-defines with power and beauty; identity is celebrated, not judged	Not Pakistani; Indigenous North American worldview

#	Poem / Poet	Cultural World	Dominant Themes	Moral / Ideological Messaging	Gender / Power Visibility	Local Markers
				of human, land, spirit		
18	Love — An Essence of All Religions — Rumi	Sufi / universal mystical space	Transformative power of love across faith traditions	Love dissolves suffering, hierarchy, and conflict; love is presented as supra-sectarian ethical force	Love is a leveling force that softens power structures	Strongly aligned with shared Islamic/South Asian Sufi discourse in Pakistan
19	A Man of Words and Not of Deeds — Charles Perrault	Moral nursery-rhyme style; generic social world	Hypocrisy, empty speech vs real action	Words without action are corruption; moral worth = doing, not talking	Authority is moral rather than gendered	None (general human proverb style)
20	In Broken Images — Robert Graves	Modern self-reflection; intellectual/argumentative internal world	Knowledge, doubt, humility, self-critique	Doubt and self-questioning lead to sharper understanding than arrogant certainty	Power critique is epistemic (who claims to “know”); gender not explicit	None

Taking all the 20 poems into consideration, two general cultural blocs are born. The former has been anchored to Western or global frames, British industrial work ethic (Night Mail), English pastoral/spiritual introspection (Loveliest of Trees, Leisure), modernist alienation (The Hollow Men), the European moral allegory (Ozymandias, A Man of Words and Not of Deeds, In Broken Images). These poems tend to generalize their values, duty, humility, mortality, but through the imagery, institutions, and reference points which are based on the European, Christian, or Euro-modern experience, with minimal or no explicit connection to the Pakistani society.

The second group is the one which is locally or regionally based: Iqbal in his "Ruba'iyat," Qasmi in his "The Feed," Bulleh Shah, Sachal Sarmast and Rumi with his devotional humanism. The meaning in these poems is explicitly pegged in Pakistani/South Asian social realities (Karachi slums; maternal hunger; Sufi humanism; Punjabi grief; Sindhi spiritual self-annihilation; postcolonial Muslim dignity). Their themes revolve around themes of class injustice, the feminine labour, anti-colonial selfhood, spiritual responsibility and love as a leveling force within the local, cultural and religious lexicons.

Most importantly, gender and social power are only manifested in the culturally local poems. A Sindhi Woman canotrophically previews the physical power and beauty of a working-class Pakistani woman in Karachi slums; The Feed reveals structural inadequacy and motherhood in the intimate terms of the Punjab instead of the remote heroic manhood; Bulleh Shah is dramatizing mourning, attachment, and mortality in small-scale Punjabi terms, not in remote heroic ones. The western poems seldom focus on the social world of a Pakistani learner or gendered labour, but rather tend to place the learner as a respectful bystander to another person and his or her institutions or nature.

In the case of RQ1, the response is thus disproportionate: the identity of Pakistani/South Asian and spirituality, classes, gender, and struggle are abundant - yet, only in a part of the poems, whereas the rest of Book 3 remains directed to the outside, but not to the inside of cultural imagination.

Table 2

CEFR B1-B2 Communicative/Interpretive Demands Across all Poem

#	Poem / Poet	Linguistic Load (Lexis / Syntax)	Pragmatic / Interpretive Demand	Sociocultural / Intercultural Demand	CEFR-Relevant Competence (B1–B2)
1	The Rain — W. H. Davies	Mostly concrete lexis; simple syntax with metaphor (“rich leaves,” “poor leaves”)	Infer class metaphor and moral stance on charity	Understand social hierarchy and “sharing downward”	B1–B2: explain a moral viewpoint on inequality
2	Night Mail — W. H. Auden	Dense noun phrases; rapid listing; British place names	Track multiple recipients and infer pride in national service	Requires understanding a whole civic system (postal rail) in a British context	B2: summarize main ideas of civic functioning; describe service roles
3	Loveliest of Trees — A. E. Housman	Poetic compression; archaic references to lifespan (“threescore years and ten”); Easter vocabulary	Infer link between spring beauty and awareness of mortality	Requires recognition of Christian seasonal markers and English woodland imagery	B2: interpret implied attitude toward life/death; relate emotion to cultural reference
4	O Where Are You Going? — W. H. Auden	Repetitive Q&A dialogue; some archaic diction (“midden,” “furnace”)	Distinguish fearful voice vs determined traveler; thematize courage under social pressure	Requires reading the “warning voice” as social control and the traveler as resistant selfhood	B1–B2: discuss intentions and resistance in an emotionally charged situation
5	In the Street of the Fruit Stalls — Stallworthy	Vivid sensory lexis (“melon, guava, mandarin,” “dark dew,” “lantern’s orbit”); mostly concrete images	Read poverty and desire through sensorial richness, not direct moral lecture	Requires interpreting a postcolonial South Asian bazaar/night market, child poverty,	B2: narrate observed social reality; interpret social inequality through imagery

#	Poem / Poet	Linguistic Load (Lexis / Syntax)	Pragmatic / Interpretive Demand	Sociocultural / Intercultural Demand	CEFR-Relevant Competence (B1–B2)
				informal economy	
6	A Sindhi Woman — Stallworthy	Accessible but image-heavy; descriptive (“bare foot,” “stone jar,” “Karachi slums”)	Infer dignity and grace from her movement; contrast narrator’s “stoop” with her upright strength	Requires understanding gendered labour, urban poverty, Karachi’s socio-economic texture	B2: describe social conditions in one’s own community; articulate respect/critique
7	Times — Ecclesiastes	Simple repetitive structure (“a time to...”) but biblically formal register	Interpret cyclical philosophy: acceptance that all human acts have ordained seasons	Requires grasp of Abrahamic religious worldview in which time is sacred and purposeful	B1: explain philosophical attitude to life events; compare to one’s own beliefs
8	Ozymandias — Shelley	Elevated diction (“antique land,” “sneer of cold command”); sonnet compression	Infer critique of tyranny and transience of empire	Requires linking ruined statue to political arrogance and decay	B2: explain political/moral lesson from a historical artifact
9	The Feed — Qasmi	Plain narrative lexis; metaphor of sparrow mother feeding many chicks	Read maternal sacrifice as social injustice, not just animal behavior	Requires mapping natural scene to Pakistani class hunger and scarcity	B1–B2: narrate empathy, describe injustice affecting vulnerable dependents
10	The Hollow Men — Eliot	Fragmented, repetitive, abstract syntax; dense modernist symbolism	Infer spiritual paralysis (“stuffed men,” “hollow men”), hopeless collective voice	Requires familiarity with crisis-of-modernity discourse and moral exhaustion after war/violence	B2: interpret alienation and existential critique in abstract poetic language

#	Poem / Poet	Linguistic Load (Lexis / Syntax)	Pragmatic / Interpretive Demand	Sociocultural / Intercultural Demand	CEFR-Relevant Competence (B1–B2)
1 1	Leisure — Davies	Simple syntax and questions; concrete natural imagery	Infer critique of busy modern life; understand “no time to stand and stare” as spiritual warning	Requires recognizing industrial / modern stress culture even if not explicitly Pakistani	B1: express opinion on lifestyle and stress; justify why “leisure” matters
1 2	Ruba'iyat — Iqbal	High-register abstract nouns (faith, honor, nation, Europe’s “empty soul”); exhortative address	Decode “khudi,” link selfhood to collective Muslim uplift, interpret critique of Europe’s spiritual decay	Requires knowledge of Muslim self-strength discourse, anti-colonial pride, pan-Islamic and national commitment	B2: explain ideological viewpoint; summarize persuasive call to identity and duty
1 3	A Tale of Two Cities — John Peter	Accessible rhyme, war imagery, civic devastation	Infer anti-war humanism: civilians are powerless, landscapes ruined	Requires imagining conflict zones and post-war trauma	B1–B2: recount consequences of violence; take moral stance against war
1 4	My Neighbour Friend Breathing His Last! — Bulleh Shah	Direct emotional address, repeated lament “What should I do, O God! Aghast!”; spiritual/relational vocabulary	Interpret grief at impending death as spiritual crisis, not just personal loss	Requires familiarity with Punjabi/Sufi framing of beloved friend and soul departing	B2: describe intense grief in culturally rooted spiritual terms; mediate that meaning
1 5	He Came to Know Himself — Sachal Sarmast	Mystical diction (self-annihilation in love, “Mansur,” “gallows”), repetitive devotional structure	Infer that divine love erases ego and social labels; suffering = path to truth	Requires knowledge of Sufi martyrdom narratives and Sindhi mystical discourse	B2: interpret culturally embedded spiritual philosophy for an outside audience

#	Poem / Poet	Linguistic Load (Lexis / Syntax)	Pragmatic / Interpretive Demand	Sociocultural / Intercultural Demand	CEFR-Relevant Competence (B1–B2)
1 6	God's Attributes — Rumi	Didactic / aphoristic lines; classical Islamic theological terms (“Seeing,” “Hearing,” “Knowing”)	Infer that divine names impose ethical accountability on the believer	Requires comfort with Islamic moral vocabulary (sin, modest speech, fear of wrongdoing) common in Pakistani discourse	B1–B2: explain moral/religious obligations; relate ethical teaching to behavior
1 7	The Delight Song — Momaday	Repetitive “I am...” declarations; rich nature metaphors; accessible syntax	Understand identity as cosmic, ecological, dignified	Requires entering an Indigenous (Native American) worldview where self = land/spirit unity	B2: describe another culture's conception of self; convey respect without appropriation
1 8	Love — An Essence of All Religions — Rumi	Parallel structures (“Through love...”), metaphor chains (vinegar → sweet wine, fire → light)	Interpret love as transformative spiritual force beyond sectarian boundaries	Requires engagement with universalist Sufi ethics that also resonate with Pakistani plural-religious discourse	B2: mediate intercultural/religious tolerance narrative in accessible English
1 9	A Man of Words and Not of Deeds — Perrault	Childlike rhyme, cumulative imagery, simple clause structure	Infer moral lesson: empty talk = moral decay	Cultural demand is low; message is general/portable	B1: restate proverb-like moral teaching; apply to real-life behavior
2 0	In Broken Images — Graves	Balanced antithetical structure (“He is quick... I am slow...”); argumentative logic	Infer epistemic humility: doubters learn more than the overconfident	Sociocultural requirement is mostly intellectual (how we know, who claims authority)	B2: articulate a reflective position on knowledge, certainty, and critical thinking

In all 20 poems, the majority of the texts demand cognitive and interpretive tasks that fit the CEFR B1-B2: discerning stance, mediation of meaning, encapsulation of ideological stance, and connection culturally contextualized texts to an audience. There are those like Night Mail and

Loveliest of Trees, in which learners are required to re-create an implicitly British civic and Christian seasonal context. The Hollow Men and In Broken Images require abstract philosophical thinking, self-placement and critical introspection, which are typical attributes of B2-level interpretive processes. The Sufi poems (Bulleh Shah, Sachal Sarmast, Rumi), "Ruba'iyat," "A Sindhi Woman," and the Feed require something other, yet equally developed: students have to express in English the local or familiar religious, ethical, and social realities (Karachi slums, hunger, the Islamic moral vocabulary, the Sindhi/Punjabi Sufi humanism). It is directly correlated with the focus of CEFR on mediation and pluricultural competence and the capacity to describe their own sociocultural world rather than the world of a person.

Notably, high intercultural load and high test-fairness risk in your coded analysis include also several so-called local poems, such as the Iqbal, the Sachal Sarmast, the Bulleh Shah, and the Rumi, since they all assume that the learner already knows the Sufi cosmology and Islamic theological terminology, or the anti-colonial politics in general.

That informs us of two things in RQ2. To start with, these poems are effective means of mediation skills on the level of CEFR (students describe local culture in English). Second, unless assessment scaffolds that background knowledge, it can only be beneficial to those students who are already socialized into those discourses (religious/Sufi, nationalist, class-conscious) causing equity issues.

Table 3

Learner Positioning and Identity Across All Poems

#	Poem / Poet	Who Is the Implied Learner / Addressee?	Expected Learner Role (Passive Receiver vs Active Moral / Critical Agent)	Citizenship / Identity Offered to the Learner
1	The Rain — W. H. Davies	A moral observer of inequality	Empathetic moral interpreter: recognize unfairness and value generosity	A humane global citizen who believes the strong owe care to the weak, but without local political context
2	Night Mail — W. H. Auden	A respectful admirer of civic efficiency	Appreciative observer of national service	A citizen who trusts institutions and values collective duty, modeled on British public service culture
3	Loveliest of Trees — A. E. Housman	An introspective individual facing mortality	Reflective self who should appreciate beauty before death	A universalized romantic self, grounded in English Christian seasonal time, not specifically Pakistani
4	O Where Are You Going? — W. H. Auden	A potential traveler / risk-taker	Courageous actor who resists social fear and control	An individualist moral agent who asserts autonomy despite warnings; identity framed as personal bravery
5	In the Street of the Fruit Stalls — Stallworthy	Onlooker in a South Asian bazaar	Sympathetic witness to poverty, hunger, desire, and color	A socially aware subject who sees classed childhood vulnerability in a postcolonial street economy

#	Poem / Poet	Who Is the Implied Learner / Addressee?	Expected Learner Role (Passive Receiver vs Active Moral / Critical Agent)	Citizenship / Identity Offered to the Learner
6	A Sindhi Woman — Stallworthy	Middle-class/educated observer watching a working-class Pakistani woman cross Karachi slums	Humble learner: you are supposed to admire her strength and rethink your own moral/physical posture	A Pakistani citizen who is asked to recognize the dignity and resilience of marginalized women in local urban poverty
7	Times — Ecclesiastes	A human soul under divine order	Accepting believer who understands that every act has its time	A theistically grounded moral subject who sees life as patterned and purposeful, without explicit nation reference
8	Ozymandias — Shelley	Witness of fallen empire	Historical judge who rejects arrogance of absolute power	A critical global subject who understands tyranny collapses; implicitly anti-despotic citizen
9	The Feed — Qasmi	Observer of maternal struggle and hunger (coded as local social reality)	Ethically responsive witness: you must feel the injustice of scarcity	A morally responsible Pakistani subject who is expected to empathize with the poor/marginal caregiver
10	The Hollow Men — Eliot	Member of a spiritually exhausted collective (“we are the hollow men”)	Self-diagnosing critic: admit emptiness, confront paralysis	A modern subject aware of moral decay, alienation, meaninglessness; identity is crisis, not celebration
11	Leisure — Davies	Overworked modern person	Self-correcting agent: slow down, reclaim spiritual attention	A reflective human who resists dehumanizing pace of modern/industrial life
12	Ruba'iyat — Iqbal	Muslim/Pakistani youth, “my nation,” future leaders	Active builder: rise, strengthen khudi, take responsibility	A spiritually anchored, anti-colonial Pakistani/Muslim self who links personal excellence to collective destiny
13	A Tale of Two Cities — John Peter	Civilian surrounded by violence	Witness and moral accuser of war	A humane global/postcolonial citizen who condemns militarized suffering
14	My Neighbour Friend Breathing His Last! — Bulleh Shah	Intimate companion who cannot bear the beloved’s departure	Openly grieving soul allowed to cry out to God, challenge loss	A Punjabi/South Asian Sufi subject for whom love, death, and spiritual panic are all legitimate public emotions

#	Poem / Poet	Who Is the Implied Learner / Addressee?	Expected Learner Role (Passive Receiver vs Active Moral / Critical Agent)	Citizenship / Identity Offered to the Learner
15	He Came to Know Himself — Sachal Sarmast	Spiritual seeker inside Sindhi Sufi cosmology	Radical truth-seeker: surrender ego, embrace suffering, transcend identity labels	A plural, supra-sectarian self whose worth is measured in love and annihilation of ego, not in caste, sect, or hierarchy
16	God's Attributes — Rumi	Believer who must internalize divine Names as ethical discipline	Morally accountable actor: control speech, fear wrongdoing, live consciously	A God-conscious subject whose sense of self is regulated by awareness that one is seen/heard/judged by God
17	The Delight Song — Momaday	Indigenous self declaring worth to the universe	Proud, self-defining subject who asserts identity without external validation	A spiritually rooted, land-connected self; not Pakistani but modeled as dignified, sovereign, non-Western identity
18	Love — An Essence of All Religions — Rumi	Spiritual human being capable of universal love	Mediator: heal division through love, reinterpret suffering as grace	A plural, tolerant subject whose ethical center is love rather than sectarian or institutional authority
19	A Man of Words and Not of Deeds — Perrault	Listener needing moral instruction (often framed as a child or moral learner)	Corrected learner: move from empty talk to honest doing	A practical moral self judged by actions, not promises; universally portable identity
20	In Broken Images — Graves	Thinker comparing self with others	Critical inquirer: distrust certainty, refine understanding	An intellectually humble subject; identity is formed through questioning, not blind confidence

This table is a direct response to RQ3. Two opposing positions of learners are observed. The learner in the context of most of the global / Western poems (Auden, Housman, Eliot, Graves), becomes either (a) an admiring spectator of another system of things (e.g., British civic efficiency in Night Mail), or (b) a contemplative figure, who is grappling with existential or philosophical issues (The Hollow Men The Hollow Men, In Broken Images, etc.). The identity presented to the learner there is usually universalised, although it will actually be pegged to Euro-modern anxieties, and Christian temporally, British industrial discipline, or Western liberal individualism. Conversely, the local/South Asian/Sufi poems (Iqbal, "Ruba'iyat," "A Sindhi Woman, The Feed, Bulleh Shah, Sachal Sarmast, Rumi) put the learner into the role of an interior moral and political agent in Pakistani / South Asian space. The learner is called a young person who should uplift their country (Iqbal), a witness of the hardship of classes and gender in Karachi (A Sindhi Woman), a moral agent in charge of hunger and nurturing (The Feed), a heartbroken soul who should be free

to weep to God (Bulleh Shah), a Sufi lover who cannot afford social categories of being (Sachal Sarmast), and a devout person obligated by moral standards to divine qualities (Rumi).

Pedagogically, this implies that the syllabus is not a neutral one. It creates two conceivable English selves; (1) the civilized world witness to the history and life of other countries and nations, and (2) the morally responsible Pakistani/South Asian self who is called upon to assert spiritual depth, social duty and opposition to injustice. The latter is the only identity that asserts the Pakistani cultural subjecthood in English. This is the key to your argument: English Book 3 is capable of replicating external narratives, but can also be employed to name, theorize local dignity - particularly the gendered labour, poverty, spiritual pluralism, and anti-colonial selfhood.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Whose Culture is Being Taught?

A complete analysis of the poetry reveals that Book 3 does not offer Pakistani intermediate learners one, consistent cultural narrative, but two parallel cultural universes. One of them is rooted in the British or Euro-modern experience, industrial discipline and civic service (Night Mail), romantic pastoral spirituality and Christian temporality (Loveliest of Trees), existential fragmentation and alienation of the post-war era (The Hollow Men), and moral allegory whose foundations lay in European history and philosophy (Ozymandias, In Broken Images). The other one is grounded in South Asian, Muslim, Pakistani and Sufi experience - working women in informal Karachi economy (A Sindhi Woman), Quranically-informed moral responsibility (Rumi), anti-colonial Muslim self-assertion (Iqbal), class injustice and hunger (Qasmi), the politics of oppression and hope (Faiz), spiritual-humanist opposition to sectarian and caste division (Sachal Sarmast, Bulleh Shah). This division is important since cultural information in textbooks can never be neutral; it is one of the principal locations where institutions make natural certain identities and social orders (Apple, 1992; Fairclough, 1992; Luke, 1995). Historically, English textbooks in most postcolonial regimes have established British modernity as the civilized standard, with the local world being either destroyed or civilized into a folklore (Pennycook, 2017; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Book 3 is a way of making it even more difficult as it provides Pakistani/South Asian voices with serious moral and political power. Nevertheless, the simultaneity of the two worlds creates tension, too: both British industrial nationalism and Pakistani spiritual-national selfhood are monitored as normative, and this makes geopolitical history a bit flat, with empire and anti-empire coexisting without defining who has power, a standard depoliticizing tactic in curricular discourse (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998).

5.2. To Which Learner do we want to become?

The poems create two subject positions among the Pakistani learner. In most of the "Western" poetry, the student is placed in a respectful role and onlooker of another persons moral order: the ideal reader of Before I was shaken with a literary seasonal Understanding in night mail is a believer in institutional efficiency and national service; the ideal reader of Loveliest of Trees is in a seasonal Christian frame of mind. The student is not an actor, he is a guest, which is aligned with older ELT models when learners of English engage in Anglophone culture as an indicator of being educated (Pennycook, 2017; Holliday, 2013). Conversely, the Pakistani / South Asian poems make the learner morally culpable and historically accountable. Iqbal urges the learner specifically to awaken, construct, and redeem the ummah; Faiz urges silence under injustice to be a kind of complicity; "A Sindhi Woman" urges the learner to review the class, gender and dignity in their own streets; the Sufi poets (Bulleh Shah, Sachal Sarmast) make love, humility and spiritual truth an opposition to clerical, caste and feudal authority. The learner is not merely decoding, the learner is being interpolated into an ethical position (Gee, 2014; Norton, 2013). This, is not a trifling

pedagogical point: it is not a teaching literature, but is, in fact, busy making competing citizen-subjects the agreeable enthusiast of order, and the testifying, accountable, even rebellious moral agent.

5.3. CEFR, Mediation, and Cultural Ownership.

The latest formulations of CEFR leave the grammatical mastery behind and focus on the mediation, pluricultural competence, and the way the learner can interpret, explain, and reframe culturally embedded meaning with the help of different audiences (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo and North, 2020). It is this perspective that allows two directions in Book 3. The former is extratextual mediation: poems such as *Night Mail*, *Loveliest of Trees*, *The Hollow Men*, demand that Pakistani students re-invent British civic ethics, Christian temporality and Western post-war despair to an imaginary audience, a classic target culture demand in ELT (Byram, 1997; Holliday, 2013). The second is inward mediation: poems such as *A Sindhi Woman*, *The Feed*, *Ruba'iyat*, and the Sufi selections ask the learners to describe the gendered labour, maternal scarcity, anti-colonial Muslim dignity and Sufi metaphysics of love and annihilation internally. There, English as a language of self-expression and not external praise is manifested, repeating in this manner the critical pedagogical demand that students are no longer the ventriloqued speakers of the other person (Freire, 1970; Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2017; Norton, 2013). This is exactly the stage of ethical, situated mediation which CEFR relates to B1-B2 communicative competence (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo and North, 2020).

5.4. Gender, Work, and Visibility.

The differences in texts imported and local are the greatest in gendered labour. The Euro-modern poems stress civic duty, factory work, thoughtfulness, even existential burnt out-ness - but the labour of women, and women on the lower rungs, in particular, is incidental or not present at all, and women are represented as passive consumers (letters to the woman upstairs). Morally central in the local poems, particularly, the working-class woman in the poem, *A Sindhi Woman*, is the labouring body. She is also structurally underprivileged but the poem positions her balance, movement and endurance as a kind of benchmark against which the (probably male, educated) viewer is put to shame. This reverses the common classroom gaze where it is the English-reading middle class that interprets the poor, but rather the poor woman is the moral center of interest and the viewer is he who has to explain his sitting position (van Dijk, 1998; Norton, 2013). This is consistent with feminist and postcolonial criticism that education tends to make the sacrifice of women aesthetic with material exploitation denied (Pennycook, 2017), not unlike Freire (1970), and it all itself rubs against the warning that potentially liberatory writing is neutralized when it is turned into a sentimental moral instead of a form of questioning class, gender, and power.

5.5. Implications for Curriculum and Assessment

Two implications follow. To begin with, the Book 3 poetry syllabus is culturally plural as it is both British/Euro-modern and Pakistani/South Asian/Sufi. It is no longer a question to curriculum designers of whether or not to incorporate local content. but "Is it not the case that we are prepared in teacher guidance and assessment to recognize that the book ciphers clashing patterns of citizenship, spirituality and social responsibility? (Kumaravadevelu, 2003; Norton, 2013). Second, in case Pakistan seeks to align intermediate English with communicative objectives that are based on CEFR, it must understand that its best CEFR-related content is not the praise of British trains or English cherry blossoms. The students are demanded to justify, defend, and make their own place in their own world, which is informal labour economy in Karachi, postcolonial resistance, Sufi plurality, hunger, dignity, moral responsibility, in English (Council of Europe, 2020; North, 2021; Piccardo & North, 2020). The way of assessment ought to shift away off of state the theme

all the way to What does this poem ask you to be in society, and how would you described this to someone who is not a Pakistani. That turn makes English not a means of passive cultural intake but of expression of cultural proprietary.

6. CONCLUSION

The review of the entire book 3 of the twenty poems reveals that the Pakistani intermediate English curriculum is culturally not neutral: this is a place where students get presented alternative models of the self via English. On the one hand, British and Euro-modern poems place the student in the role of an appreciative and civilized viewer of external moral orders - industrial discipline, institutional efficiency, Christian-temporal reflection, the post-war philosophical anxiety. Pakistani/South Asian and Sufi poetry, on the other side, challenges the learner with responsibility: to watch poverty and gendered labour in Karachi, to rebel against oppression and starvation, to develop in the Muslim self and moral responsibility, to rebel against clerical and caste power, to find dignity and voice. Such local poems do not simply add culture. They open up the learner to refer to oneself as an ethical and political subject who is part of this place. They as well provoke CEFR-related competences on a profound level: explaining their own world, intermediating between spiritual and social meaning between cultures, and expressing principled criticism. Conversely, most of the imported poems have the learners largely translating the world of another person in a respectful manner. This opposition reveals a curricular contradiction in which English is both being used as a language of admiration of the global centre and as a language of self-definition of the periphery.

The policy and pedagogical implication is straightforward. The inquiry on the Pakistani English education in the intermediate level is not whether English can bear the Pakistani culture - that it already bears. Whether that voice which is culturally constructed and morally charged and socially located will be authorized in the classroom and in evaluation, or whether it will be edged out to generic moral lessons, memorized paraphrase. Unless assessment remains focused on inculcating passive reproduction (state the theme, give the moral) then the curriculum will be overfaith in using its strongest resource poems that train the learner to write the social reality, gendered experience, spiritual word and political awareness in English. When, though, the system coordinates its inquiry, classroom work and marking with CEFR-style mediation, get asked to explain what this poem is asking you to be, and why that is important in your society, then English ceases to be a language of external admiration and becomes a language of expressed Pakistani identity. This is the actual outcome of literacy.

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