

A New Historicist Perspective of John Denham's *The Sophy* and Robert Baron's *Mirza*

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Abstract

The present paper attempts the application of new historicist perspectives to John Denham's play *The Sophy* and Robert Baron's play *Mirza*. Both the plays have been analyzed together due to elements of similarity in theme, plot and source. The playwrights have used these plays as oblique commentaries on the socio-historical and political conditions of the period but at the same time these plays also embody deeper meanings beyond the topical and national references. These plays may well be viewed as reinforcing the notion of cultural hegemony of the West and thereby representing the psychological divide between the Occident and Orient. The researchers contend that both Denham and Baron have misrepresented the Orient and Oriental characters in their plays since most of the characters have been represented as cultural stereotypes. The research paper aims to find out as to how both the plays support the dominant ideology of the period which was to misrepresent the Oriental characters. Both the plays have been explicated in the light of some of the key aspects of New Historicism.

Keywords: *New Historicism, misrepresentation, Orient, cultural stereotypes, dominant ideology, discourse*

Introduction

The paper starts with the brief introduction of some of the key terms introduced in this study. Then it offers the concept of new historicism and aims of this study. The middle section provides a new historicist analysis of the two plays in which the researchers have explicated the plays in the light of new historicist assumptions such as use of anecdote, historicity of text, and textuality of history, and discourse and power relations. The analysis section leads to the conclusion where the researchers opine that the selected plays support the dominant ideology of the period. Both Denham's *The Sophy* and Baron's *Mirza* deal with the story of King of Persia, Shah Abbas, Prince Mirza, Abbas' son, and Sophy, Abbas' grandson. The plays focus how Shah Abbas, the sensual and tyrannical despot, imprisons and blinds his own son Mirza to prolong his regime.

The term Orient had apolitical meaning in the past. It referred to the knowledge of eastern languages and cultures. Nevertheless, Edward Said, in his work *Orientalism* (2003) has dwelt on it from a new angle. Now, it carries deeper meanings than the traditional and neutral meanings, which were once attached with it. Said (2003) defines the term Orientalism from three different perspectives. In the academic sense, it refers to the idea that “[a]nyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient... is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism” (p. 2). In this category, one can include the travelers, religious people, administrators, anthropologists, historians and philologists who studied the Orient as a source of information. Secondly, in the general sense, as a style of thought, it means the epistemological and ontological difference between the Orient and the Occident. In this category, there literary figures, scholars, and philosophers who have portrayed the Orients as cultural others and highlighted the differences. Thirdly, as a corporate Orientalism, it alludes to “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (ibid, p. 3). The third definition refers to the discourse of Orientalism which enabled the West to hegemonize the East. Both the first and second definitions relate Orientalism to, in the words of Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (1999), “the textual creation” of the Orient whereas the third definition deals with how the West used the discourse of Orientalism in the East to “execute domination” (p. 69).

Simply speaking, the term Orient alludes to the East and Eastern countries whereas the term Occident refers to the West and Western countries respectively. Discourse refers to anything spoken or written that produces knowledge and, thereby, molds the minds of people. It functions as a tool of power for dominant groups and serves their purposes. It is a frequently used term in new historicism and Said’s *Orientalism*, and both have borrowed it from Michel Foucault. Under the influence of Foucault, new historicists sometimes use it as an alternative term for ideology. England used an imperialist or renaissance discourse to hegemonize and dominate the Orient.

New historicism or cultural poetics sprang forth due to the neglect of the study of socio-historical, economic, and political contexts in the existing literary theories. Anton Keas (1989) records that “Reinserting a text in its historical context means relating it to a vast and varied field of cultural representations” (p. 4). This literary method of criticism argues that along with the analysis of the content of a literary text, a critic should also concentrate on the history of the writer, as history is an indispensable aspect of the text. New historicists consider that themes and characterizations introduced in a literary text may be common and relate to the contemporary culture. Thus, the study of a literary text with special reference to the historical, biographical, social and cultural contexts makes it a new historicist reading.

New historicism advocates a parallel study or juxtaposition of the literary works with the non-literary works belonging to the same period. Both literary and non-literary works get equal attention, and both are closely read. In this way, these parallel discourses are employed to interrogate the common social and political forces of the period. Thus, non-literary works do not form

the context of literary works but stand out as a co-text along with the literary works. New historicist reading practice usually neglects the existing traditional criticism on the literary works which are scrutinized from a new historical perspective.

Stephen Greenblatt (1982), the main practitioner of new historicism, suggests the four basic assumptions of new historicism. Firstly, literary works are history-oriented, hence they are the negotiations of complex social and cultural forces. Secondly, literary works proffer an alternative vision of history. Thirdly, literary as well as historical works are constituted by social and political forces of the period and, in return, constitute them. Moreover, literary works are ideological products of the period in which they are created. Finally, literature should be interpreted in terms of its historical contexts because, as it has been mentioned earlier, literature is history-oriented (pp.1-2). This is the typical procedure which Greenblatt has employed in the study of Renaissance plays by juxtaposing them with the historical documents of the period and, in this way, offers new insights into the Renaissance studies.

This paper attempts to find answers to the following questions:

- a) What sort of effects do Denham and Baron create through the dramatic representations of Oriental characters in their plays as the cultural others?
- b) In what way(s) do Denham's *The Sophy* and Baron's *Mirza* promote ideologies that support or undermine the prevailing power structures of the period in which they are written and performed?
- c) To what extent do these dramatic representations of the Oriental characters play role in constructing identities of the English audience?

While using the qualitative research paradigm, the researchers have applied the theoretical framework of new historicism to the descriptive textual analysis of John Denham's *The Sophy* and Robert Baron's *Mirza*. New historicists usually focus on the issues like use of anecdote, historicity of text and textuality of history, discourse and power relations, construction of identity, concept of text, author and critic etc. in their analyses. However, the researchers have applied only some of the major principles of new historicists to these plays as it is difficult to apply all the assumptions of a theory to a literary work.

Use of Anecdote

... poore prince! the path he treads to add luster to his Fathers Diadem, to do his country good, to be accounted commendable; betrays his steps, and intices him to an affrighting precipice: the more he labours to delight his Father, it serves as fuel to unjust jealousy; the more he dignifies his countries honour, the more applause the people crown him with; and Abbas fears his popularity. (Herbert, 1634, p.174)

Sir Thomas Herbert (1634) in this extract of *A Relation of Some Years Travaile* mentions jealousy and fear as two main flaws of Shah Abbas which caused his own catastrophe as well as the tragic death of his son Mirza. Like Herbert, Denham and Baron also highlight these two flaws of Shah Abbas in their plays. Following him, Denham (1642) in *The Sophy* makes King Abbas confess to Mirza:

but he that now
Has poison'd thee, first poison'd me with Jealousie,
A foolish causeless Jealousie. (Denham, 1642, 5.i)

In the first act of this play, Mirvan, the co-conspirator of Haly, advises him that by capitalizing on Abbas' fears, he can befool the king and make him go against Mirza:

Work on his Fears, till Fear hath made him cruel;
And Cruelty shall make him fear again. (ibid, 1.i)

Like Denham, Baron (1642) also follows Herbert in his play *Mirza*. Baron comments in 'The Argument' of the play that "This jealousy... irritated by some Cabinet Counselors, enemies to the Prince about the King, begat in him a fear of the Prince growth" (Baron, 1642, p. 6). At the end of the play, Abbas confesses that it was his jealousy which caused Mirza's imprisonment and his subsequent death:

I did,
I did, O mischief of credulity!
And cause lesse jealousy! (ibid, 5. pp. 134-135)

This similarity in the representation of Shah Abbas in three different discourses shows how the writers and playwrights of the early modern English period perceived Shah Abbas. Thus, all these works reveal intertextuality or interplay of the discourses which may be the focal point of the new historicist analyses. Intertextuality means that two texts may be interpreted and explained with the help of each other. This intertextuality and interaction of discourses enables the new historicists to know the conditions in which the text was created and, finally, to recover the dominant ideology of the period. Intertextuality and inter-discursive practices show that the relationship between the play and the historical work is dialectic and "material ... is transferred from one discursive sphere to another and becomes aesthetic property" (Greenblatt, 1982, p.3).

New historicists usually start analyzing a literary work by juxtaposing it with a non-literary work which may be described as an anecdote. New historicists do so to link the literary work with the real and, in this way, make some general statements. As Michael Payne (2005) comments that "A typical new historicist procedure is to begin with a striking event or anecdote, which has the effect of arousing skepticism about grand historical narratives or essentializing descriptions of a historical period such as the Renaissance" (p.

3). The above lines taken from Sir Thomas Herbert's *A Relation of Some Years Travaile* (1634) allude to the tragic story of Shah Abbas' son Prince Mirza. To Herbert, Mirza's heroic deeds and war victories make Shah Abbas jealous of Mirza and go against his son. Provoked by jealousy, Abbas blinds Mirza and imprisons him so that he may rule Persia for a long time without any fear of a rival prince. Though there is no doubt that Herbert's work provides useful information regarding the Safavid period yet it retains "some historical inaccuracies" (Loloi, 2012, pp. 349-350) and reflects Herbert's Eurocentric perspectives. The discourse that Thomas Herbert has employed to talk about the cultural others and Islam may be described as imperialist discourse. Parvin Loloi further perceives Herbert an unsophisticated and badly informed traveler in whose narration the historical Abbas has been transformed into the most enduring stereotype of medieval and Renaissance thought- the cruel Oriental tyrant (ibid). Similarly, John Butler, under the entry of Thomas Herbert, published on October 29, 2010 in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, comments that Herbert's account shows "a marked prejudice against Islam" and he also shares the Western stereotype of the "oriental despot," and comments at length about the unfettered power of rulers such as Shah Abbas and Jahāngir (q.v.), comparing them unfavorably with the English system of government. (n.p)

John Denham's *The Sophy* (1642) and Robert Baron's *Mirza* (1642) are based on this tragic story of Mirza and both playwrights have heavily drawn upon Herbert's *A Relation of Some Years Travaile* (1634) as their source. Both plays are similar in terms of plot, theme, and source except a few differences. Moreover, both plays have Islamic setting which has been emphasized through the choice of the names of well-known Muslim figures, through the story of Muslim rulers and by the oaths which these Oriental characters constantly utter in the name of their Prophet Mahomet and Mortys Ally. Even the recent critics like Linda McJannet (1999), Mathew Birchwood (2007), Sheiba Kia Kaufman (2016), and Amin Momeni (2016) have treated and analyzed both plays together due to their thematic and source similarities. Like Herbert's work, Denham's and Baron's play also reflect their Eurocentric perspectives towards the representation of Islam and the cultural others i.e. the Oriental characters.

Similarly, both playwrights have used the same imperialist discourse to portray the Oriental characters. The Eurocentric perspectives refer to the biased and prejudiced perception of European-Western philosophers and scholars about the Orient. Edward Said has used this term in *Orientalism* to talk about the western representations of the Orient. According to Said (2003), the Western representations of the Orient are formations or deformations (p. 273). This is true in case of both Denham and Baron since both have misrepresented the Orient and Oriental characters in their plays. The writers and playwrights have created their works to instruct and entertain the audience of the early modern period through the cultural others since the Oriental material retained a great fascination for the audience of the period. But, along with instruction and entertainment, their works have deep

ideological implications as well. They have demonized the Oriental characters and represented them as cultural stereotypes through this discourse with a view to establishing cultural hegemony and authority over the Orient.

Historicity of the Text and Textuality of History

Historicity of text means that a work of art cannot be read in isolation from the cultural conditions since there is a dialectic relationship between the two and both “are mutually imbricated” (Payne, 2005, p.3). Textuality of history refers to the fact that history may be read and explored in the texts of the past. In other words, all the contemporary texts/ discourses be they literary, historical, religious or political form textuality of the history or inter-textuality. This inter-textuality and interaction of discourses enables the new historicists to know the conditions in which the text was created and, finally, to recover the dominant ideology of the period. As far as Denham’s *The Sophy* (c. 1642) and Baron’s *Mirza* (c. 1642) are concerned, both plays were created in 1640s during the reign of King Charles 1. Denham’s *The Sophy* was “among the last plays to be acted” (Birchwood, 2007, p. 70) at the Private House in Black Friars before the closing of theaters in 1642 whereas Baron’s *Mirza* “was published in 1655 and clearly intended to be read rather than performed” (ibid).

There are some uncertainties regarding the publication date of Baron’s *Mirza*. For an example, Baron himself notes in the beginning of *Mirza* that he “had finished three compleat Acts” (Baron, 1642, p.5) of *Mirza* before he saw Denham’s *The Sophy*. If Baron’s claim is true, it means the play was created in 1642. Linda McJannet (1999) claims that the play “may even have been published and read by” King Charles and some of his courtiers “before his defeat in 1646 and his death in 1649” (p. 259). If Denham’s *The Sophy* was created earlier in 1642 and Baron’s *Mirza* was created later in 1646 or in 1655, Baron’s *Mirza* reveals continuity and extension of the same historical material. Therefore, whatever the publication date of Baron’s *Mirza* may be, it has close affinities with Denham’s *The Sophy* in terms of plot, theme and source. Both plays have allusions to the socio-historical conditions of 17th century England and may be taken as a critique, a moral lesson, or a warning to the rulers of the period. The two plays refer to the unfavorable political and religious conditions that led to the Civil War and the subsequent execution of King Charles 1. Thus, the two plays serve an oblique commentary on the regime of King Charles 1 in an allegorical manner.

Charles 1 was king of England from 1625 to 1649. He believed that a king had divine right which permitted him to exercise unlimited authority in all state affairs. This belief led him to do many unwise decisions such as his marriage attempts with Spanish Catholic princess Maria Anna and, later on, his marriage with French princess Henrietta Maria who was also a Catholic. Moreover, his conflicts with the parliament, his too much support of Duke of Buckingham and Sir Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, his enforcement of uniform religious policies through William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury, his interference with the Church of Scotland, his levying of taxes

on the people of England without getting consent from the parliament, and his determination to arrest and punish the five members of the parliament against the charges of treason were some major acts of despotism. His unwise decisions provoked public hatred and people perceived him in terms of an absolute king and a tyrant. When King Charles I was brought to Westminster Hall, the main charge against him was that “he had in fact governed by will and not by law” (Kishlansky & Morril, 2008, p. 49) and finally the executioner severed his head from his body on 30 January 1649. However, the monarchy was restored in England and the English “parliament declared Charles a martyr [and] added him to calendar of Anglican saints” (ibid, p.52).

Keeping this socio-historical condition into consideration, the tragic story of Mirza and his tyrant father Shah Abbas offers some link with the period of King Charles I. For example, the character of Shah Abbas may stand for King Charles I. Though some critics like O Hehir (1968) and Parvin Loloi (1998) think that the view that Abbas may represent Charles I seems unconvincing (Momeni, 2016, p. 77). Contrary to it, the critics like J.M. Wallace (1974), and Amin Momeni (2016) think that Abbas and Mirza reflect two different aspects of Charles I’s personality. As Momeni (2016) suggests that Denham “attempts to gesture towards Charles’s errors via” (p. 82) Abbas and Mirza. Similarly, Wallace (1974) thinks that Abbas, as an arbitrary ruler and Mirza as the good prince, allude to the two serious errors of Charles I’s personality. In both plays, it is shown that Abbas and Mirza are culpable for their fall because Abbas granted too much power to his evil counselors and Mirza absented himself from the state on important occasions (p. 274).

In Denham’s *The Sophy*, Abbas grants too much power to Haly, Mirvan, and Caliph who ultimately cause his catastrophe whereas Mirza keeps him away from the Persian court for adding more victories to his name. Similarly, in Baron’s *Mirza*, Abbas gives too much power to Mahomet Ally Beg, Beltazar and his mistress, Floradella whereas Mirza remains absent from the court due to his war exploits. The difference in two plays is that Denham portrays Abbas under the influence of political and religious counselors and Baron represents Abbas under the influence of political counselors and the ladies of his seraglio. Parallel to this situation, Charles I also gave too much power to his counselors, particularly to Duke of Buckingham, William Laud and Sir Thomas Wentworth. It is believed that it was under the influence of these counselors that Charles I committed many errors which ultimately prompted his execution. From this point of view, the characters of Haly and Mirvan in Denham’s *The Sophy* and the characters of Ally Beg and Beltazar in Baron’s *Mirza* may be analogous to Earl of Strafford and Duke of Buckingham, the evil counselors who capitalize on the monarch’s fear and Jealousy. This analogy tends to work well in Denham’s *The Sophy* where the character of Caliph may refer to William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

As Abbas had fears and jealousies, Charles I experienced the same during his reign. In his angry reply to Parliament on March 1, 1642, Charles I exclaimed that “You speak of Jealousies and Fears: Lay your hand to your hearts, and ask yourselves whether I may not likewise be disturbed with Fears

and Jealousies” (Wallace, 1974, p.273). As Abbas granted too much power to his counselors, Charles 1 also did the same. As Abbas’ fears and jealousies provoked him to do some foolish things which caused his downfall, Charles 1 also did many wrong acts which led to his downfall. As J. M. Wallace rightly points out, “Charles, driven by fears and jealousies of his own, besides those of his counselors, had committed an act of violence” (ibid, p. 287) against the five members of Parliament which was a tragic mistake and made him unpopular in the eyes of the English public. This may be analogous to Abbas’ decision of Mirza’s imprisonment and blindness. Developing this analogy further, it may be said that Mirza’s imprisonment in Denham’s *The Sophy* and Baron’s *Mirza* refers to “Charles’ infamous imprisonment in Carisbrook Castle” (Birchwood, 2007, p. 83). Thus, in short, the picture of Persia as a collapsing empire in these two plays mirrors the picture of “an England at the verge of collapse” (Ghatta, 2009, p.245).

Besides, these topical and political allusions, the two plays have some ideological implications. It was the cultural demand of the period to present the Oriental matter on the stage. This demand may be traced in Renaissance audience’s interest in the exotic appeal of the Orient, or in the fabulous riches and luxurious style of the Orient, Oriental people and monarchs, or the writers’ and playwrights’ ideological desires to construct the national and individual identities through the representation of the cultural others like the Oriental characters. It is due to this fact that Emile C. Bartels (1993) rightly thinks that the alien was a fascinating subject on the Renaissance stage (p. xiii). So, these may be considered the historicity of the two plays that eventually led to the creation of these two plays. This historicity bears out the fact that representations do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are results of negotiation or exchange and they are inter-textual. This intertextuality not only expresses the Western writers’ fascination with the Oriental content but also indicates how the parallel discourses reflect the dominant ideology of the early modern English period. Being cultural artifacts, neither these representations nor their meanings can be comprehended without comprehending the conditions which produced them. And, all these cultural representations or discourses, be they literary like Denham’s *The Sophy*, Baron’s *Mirza*, historical, such as Herbert’s *A Relation of Some Years Travaile*, or travel accounts in which the travelers have represented the tragic story of Mirza, constitute the textuality of history since it is recorded in all these texts. It is only through these texts, there is chance of getting glimpses of the past.

Discourse and Power Relations

Discourse is “the language of a particular time and place that controls and preserves social relations: discourse can be thought of as ideology in action” (Dobie, 2002, pp. 184-185). The new historicists have borrowed the concept of discourse from Michel Foucault. In Foucault’s opinion, discourse is a firmly bounded area of social knowledge. There is a close relationship between knowledge and power. Knowledge gives power and facilitates the controlling process. It is tied with the power structures of the society. The mediation or the interplay between knowledge and power gets its reflection in discourse

(Foucault, 1971). It is through discourse that a dominant group regulates power in society. Usually, regulation of power works effectively through multiplicity of discourses which may be overlapping or competing. The study of multiplicity of discourses enables new historicists to understand the socio-historical conditions which created these discourses and in return these discourses created them. With reference to Shah Abbas, King of Persia, many discourses circulated in the early modern period. In all these discourses, particularly in the literary discourses of the period, the Western writers and playwrights have represented Shah Abbas and other Islamic Persian characters in a negative manner. This thing seems more prominent in case of the Muslim leaders. The Western writers and playwrights did so due to a significant development in the history of early modern period which Emile Bartels calls “the prominent emergence of imperialist ideologies and propaganda” (Bartels, 1993, p. xiii). This development was indispensable for England to impose her dominance throughout the world (ibid, p. xiv). England achieved this objective by using and propagating a discourse which may be considered as an imperialist or Orientalist discourse. It is through this discourse that the West has, on the one hand, demonized the Orient and Oriental people, Muslims and Islam and, on the other hand, distinguished itself from the Orient by employing the binaries such as self versus other and we versus them. Moreover, this discourse manifests the biased attitude of the West towards the East which may be termed as Eurocentric perspective.

This Orientalist discourse seems the dominant discourse of the period and it can be traced in the works of writers and dramatists of the early modern period. Shah Abbas ruled Persia from 1588 to 1596. Persia prospered a lot under the exemplary government of Shah Abbas. It was Abbas who laid the foundations of modern Persia. The Persian historians remember and revere him as Shah Abbas “the Great” (Romer, 1986, p.278) due to his valuable services which he rendered for Persia. But majority of the Western writers have represented him as a cultural stereotype. For example, Edmund Spenser represents Shah Abbas as an enemy of Christianity. In *The Faerie Queen* (1590-6), he mentions Shah Abbas to warn the Christian world “against their forren foe that comes from farre” (Spenser 138) and, similarly, Thomas Heywood, in *The Four Prentices of London* (1594), portrays Abbas “as a sworn enemy of Christendom that must be eliminated” (Farahmandfar, 2016, p. 142). Thomas Minadoi (1595) in *A History of Wars Between the Turks and Persians* describes the Turks and Persians as “the Barbarians” (Hartwell, 1595, p. 6) and perceives them as “two enemies of the name of Christ” (ibid, p. 7). Spenser, Haywood and Minadoi set the tone which was followed by their successors in their works. John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins (1607) in their joint play *The Travailes of The Three English Brothers* have also portrayed Shah Abbas as an irrational and illogical person in comparison to the Sherleys who have been depicted as rational, calm and composed. During the cannon show in the play, the Persian Sophy, Shah Abbas, becomes speechless after seeing and listening the wonders of the English cannon from Sir Anthony Sherley. He is so much wonderstruck that he requests Anthony: “First teach me how to call thee ere I speake” (Ridha, 1974, 1.121, p. 52).

The Sophy says so because he considers himself an ignorant, an inferior person, an earthly creature and perceives Anthony a well-informed person, a superior person and a divine figure with “God-head” (ibid,126). Referring to such cases of adoration of Christian characters in English plays related to the Oriental matter, Nabil Matar (1999) describes them “a representation of representation” which bespeak “the birth of a British/European discourse of conquest” (pp. 15-17).

Thomas Herbert (1634) in *A Relation of Some Years Travaile* has praised Shah Abbas only once as a ruler who is “more beloved at home, more famous abroad [and] more formidable to his enemies” (p.169). Besides this short laudatory comment, he has described Abbas as if he were a devil. To him, Abbas is a “crafty” and “politicious” (ibid, p.171) ruler, a sexual “beast” who has “four thousand concubines in his seraglio” (ibid, p. 172), a cruel and inhuman King towards his subjects and a murderer of his blood relations (ibid, pp.168-177). Herbert’s negative attitude can also be found in the representation of other Oriental characters. This Orientalist discourse about Shah Abbas and Persians was popular in the cultural representations of the West. So, when Denham and Baron created their plays in the early modern culture, how they could ignore the earlier discourses related to Shah Abbas which already circulated in that culture. Definitely, being the cultural artifacts, they capitalized on and followed the works of their successors.

Denham (1642), in his play *The Sophy*, has depicted Shah Abbas as a typical Oriental despot whose negative traits can be found in the Western representations of other Oriental despots like Cambyzes, Sultan Soliman, Sultan Murad, and Sultan Selimus. He represents Abbas as a lusty fellow, superstitious, suspicious, a cruel and inhuman ruler who does not spare even his father, brothers and son to prolong his rule. The gratification of physical and sexual pleasures has made him a negligent ruler:

For though his Eye is open as the Morning’s,
Towards lusts and pleasures, yet so fast a Lethargy
Has seized his Powers towards public Cares and Dangers,
He sleeps like Death. (Denham, 1642, 1.i)

Mirvan, the co-conspirator of Haly, counsels Haly to raise Abbas’ “jealousies” and “work on his Fears” since this is the best strategy to make Abbas “suspicious” (ibid) and go against Mirza. These and ensuing dialogues further highlight the negative traits of Shah Abbas. Haly calls Abbas an “Old indulgent Father”, “Old and Jealous” (ibid, 2.i). Mirza bids farewell to Abbas’ court as it has become a place of debauchery where “Vice” is rampant (ibid). The superstitious Abbas thanks Haly for his sincerity:

Mahomet I thank thee,
I have one faithful servant, honest Haly. (ibid)

Abbas’ oath by Mahomet, the Holy Prophet would have definitely provoked a laughter among the audience of the early modern period because the English people knew that Mahomet, the Prophet of Muslims, was superstitious and so

are all the Muslims. This perception of Mahomet as a superstitious person can be found in many early modern English works. Its precise description is evident in Thomas Minadoi's (1595) work where he describes Mahomet as a "filthy and lecherous wretch" and who declared himself a prophet by concocting "certain superstitious prayers and false visitations of an Angell" (pp. 27-28). Because of his superstitious nature, Abbas compels Caliph "to advance [his] purpose" (ibid, 3.i) of taking severe action against his son Mirza, since Mirza is determined to deprive Abbas of his life and crown. Upon which, Caliph fabricates that Great Mahomet appeared and "Advised me in a Vision" to:

Tell the King,
The Prince his son attempts his Life and Crown. (ibid)

It is one of "The Prophet's Revelations", therefore, no Persian, being follower of Mahomet, can question or challenge Caliph's words. The crafty Abbas pays his thanks to Mahomet for this special care:

Great Mahomet we thank thee,
Protector of this Empire, and this Life,
Thy Cares have met my Fears. (ibid)

All these dialogues between Abbas and Caliph indicate that the Muslims driven by superstitions may lose the path of reason and virtue and can degrade themselves enough to fulfill their desires. To satisfy his jealous and credulous nature, Abbas imprisons and blinds Mirza. Upon which, the enraged Mirza calls Abbas unnatural and "Tyrant" since he "Find[s] out no other object but his Son" (ibid). It is this unfair treatment of Shah Abbas that makes the critics like H. R. Romer (1986), Linda McJannet (1999), Parvin Loloï (2012) and Amin Momeni (2016) note that the West has not paid due and deserving significance to Abbas. Denham's Eurocentric perspectives may also be observed in relation to the Turks who have been represented as cultural stereotypes. For an instance, the Turks are like a "storm" (ibid, 1.i) and "fatal" (ibid). The two Turk Bashaws are "villains" (ibid,5. i) and traitors and their emperor is an "ungrateful Master" (ibid, 2. i). It is due to such negative representations of the Turks in the play, Amin Momeni (2016) comments, that Denham's portrayal of the Turks is in line with the negative Western-European perceptions of the Ottomans (p.77). These Eurocentric perspectives can also be found in the "representation of Islamic Persians" (ibid, p. 78). For instance, these perspectives can be seen in the character of Haly, the corrupt political counselor, whose name "has religious connotations" and is 'the distortion of Ali, the fourth Muslim Caliph' (ibid). Similarly, Denham's biased and prejudiced attitude may be observed in the character of Caliph, the hypocrite religious leader, who gives "a fatwa" (ibid, p. 81) and provides justification to Abbas' actions.

Robert Baron (1642), in *Mirza*, has represented Abbas in the same negative light as his predecessors did. In 'The Argument' of the play, Baron narrates Abbas as a murderer of his father, brother and son. He is jealous, tyrant and cruel. The ghost of Emir Hamze advises Shah Abbas to

leave thy Adultries,
 Thy Rapes, thy Incest, heaps of Perjuries,
 And Ghomorean sports, no sting behind? (Baron, 1642, 1. p. 9)

Floradella, Abbas' concubine calls him "A good effeminate Prince [who] lie[s] wallowing here/ In pleasures" (ibid, p. 12). Later on, she calls him "Th' Old Dotard King" (ibid, 4. p. 97). To achieve his ends, Abbas can "ruin all mankind" (ibid, 3. p. 53). He argues that his son, Mirza's fall is tyrant's necessity:

No, he must fall; yet he falls not my crime,
 But Tyrant Necessities, that knoweth
 No law, not those of justice, nor of nature. (ibid, p. 66)

After his imprisonment, Mirza calls Abbas "cruel Father", "Tyrant Father", "unnatural Father" (ibid, pp. 68-69) and "Serpent" (ibid, 5. p. 132). Admitted, Abbas committed some of these crimes due to his bitter past and his personal fears. But, is it right to see a person in absolute evil terms? It is due to this unfair and undeserving treatment of Shah Abbas by the West, an Iranian scholar, Parvin Lololi (2012), argues that the Western writers and playwrights have changed the historical Abbas into a cultural stereotype (pp.349-350). As a cultural other, Abbas is represented as an enemy of Christianity who caused the death of "1000(some say 1200)" (Baron, 1642, p. 114) Christians. This image of Abbas as an enemy of Christianity is in perfect harmony with Abbas' image represented by Spenser, Haywood, Minadoi and other Western writers in their works. Thus, it becomes obvious that all these inter-discursive practices are rooted in same socio-historical conditions and reflect similar mindset.

This imperialist or Orientalist discourse through which the West used to assert their cultural hegemony and dominate the East can be observed in the representation of the Ottoman Turks and other Islamic Persian characters. Baron deliberately shows his hatred of English people against the Turks by depicting the Turks as the worst enemies of the Persians. The Great Turk is represented as a proud king who has set him "too high" (ibid, 2. p. 48). The Turks are false and superstitious like their Prophet (ibid, p. 194). Like Denham's Haly, Baron's Mahomet Ally-beg is also portrayed as a villain of the play and like Haly, the name Mahomet Ally has also religious connotations. He is modeled on Ali, the fourth Muslim caliph, represented as superstitious and a hellish figure by Dante, Sandy and Herbert in their works. The only difference between the two playwrights is that Denham has criticized Haly, the corrupt counselor, vis-a-vis religious hypocrisy of Islam as evident in the character of Caliph in *The Sophy*, whereas Baron criticizes Mahomet Ally-beg in relation to sensuality of Islam as shown through Floradella and other ladies of Abbas' seraglio in *Mirza*. The implication is: one playwright attempts to prove that the Muslims are hypocrite and the other says that Islam is a sensual religion.

The same Orientalist discourse of the Western writers and playwrights during early modern English period may also be located in the representation of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, Islam and Muslims in their works. For instance, Thomas Minadoi (1595) perceives both the Turks and

Persians as barbarians and enemies of Christianity. The Turks are “very rascalles and vile” while the Persians are “great deceiuers, full of craftie Stratagms, vnconstant, and breakers of their word” (Hartwell, 1595, pp. 6-7). The last vice is main characteristic of all Barbarians. Minadoi sees Islam as distortion of the teachings of Christianity (p.27). The continuity of this Orientalist discourse can also be traced in Thomas Herbert’s (1634) in *A Relation of Some Years Travaile*. To him, the Indian Mahometans are polygamous, “superstitious”, “crafty and coward” (pp.37-39).

This Orientalist discourse may also be observed in Baron’s *Mirza*. He has used this discourse to demonize Islam, Muslims and the Orient. Particularly, the annotations of the play explicitly reveal his biased attitude. With regard to the murder of Emir-Hamze by Abbas, he generalizes it and exclaims that this is “A crime most usual in these Eastern Princes” (Baron, 1642, p.183). Linda McJannet (1999) thinks that the evidence of such generalizations in the plays “recalls Said’s description of Orientalist discourse” (p. 260). Like other Western writers and scholars, Baron criticizes the Turks for being superstitious and the Persians for their love of “softness and ease, riches, pomp and vanity, curiosity and fair women” (ibid, p. 191). It is due to this fact that Linda McJannet (1999) argues that all these textual instances indicate Baron’s “Extreme prejudice and hostility” (p. 261) towards the cultural others. Baron wrote all this because misrepresentation of Islam, the Quran and the Prophet Mahomet was prevalent in the circulating discourses of the period. The continuity in the Orientalist discourse reveals intertextuality and interplay of Western discourses in the early modern period and forms what the new historicists call the circular and closed discourse. It was through these discursive practices that the Western writers and playwrights intentionally demonized the Orient, Oriental people, Islam and Muslims to establish their cultural hegemony.

Conclusion

“Personal identity-like historical events, texts, and artifacts- is shaped by and shapes the culture in which it emerges” (Tyson, 2006, p.290). All the above-mentioned discursive practices, such as historical and the literary widely, circulated in the early modern culture and played a significant role in shaping national and individual identities. The writers and playwrights of the period used these discursive practices to form the identities in different ways. Firstly, they used their works to entertain and advise the audience and rulers of the time. The point was that they should learn the lessons from the stories of cultural others and not commit the mistakes like them. In this process, it was necessary to demonize the others to get the desired effects of their message and distinguish themselves from others. As Ann B. Dobie (2002) comments, “Stephen Greenblatt points out that we define ourselves in relation to what we are not, making it necessary to demonize and objectify what we are not as ‘others’. Designated as disruptive, foreign and, perhaps mad, the ‘others’ are evidence of the rightness of our own power” (p. 180).

In this case, the selected plays serve as oblique commentaries on the topical and political conditions of the period. Secondly, these discourses enable the westerners to affirm that they are superior to the cultural others. They are gentlemen, civilized, pragmatic, rational, follower of a true and revealed religion as compared to the others who are barbarians, uncivilized, irrational, lusty, and follower of a superstitious religion. Being culturally and intellectually superior, it is our right to rule the world. Emile Bartels (1993) rightly points out that “An important part of the support for English superiority and domination was the insistence on the otherness of the other and on what had been or were becoming stereo-typical demonizations of such figures as the Turk, the Moor, or the Oriental barbarian” (p. Xiv). Thus, these cultural representations helped the artists of the period shape the identities of their audience by inculcating their cultural superiority upon their minds. They serve the function of ideological tools which played significant role in this process of shaping identities in early modern English period.

The new historicist analysis of the selected texts reveals that Denham and Baron have misrepresented the Orient, Oriental characters, Islam and Islamic characters. They did so under the ideological needs of the early modern period since other discourses of the period also bear out this fact. Hence, all these inter-discursive practices form intertextuality and shed light on the dominant ideology of the period under whose influence the writers produced such type of discourses. Both the plays seem to support the dominant ideology which pervaded the inter-discursive practices of that period. The playwrights have employed these discourses as ideological tools to define the West as superior in relation to the East as inferior and helped their audience construct their identities.

Note: This paper has been extracted from Abdul Ghaffar Bhatti’s PhD thesis entitled "Representation of the Orient in 16th & 17th century English Drama with Focus on Persia: A New Historicist Perspective."

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