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Material Agency in the Writings of Shadab Zeest Hashmi: A Transcorporeal *Sherbet*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the manifestations of material agency and its disanthropocentric hues in the writings of Pakistani anglophone writer Shadab Zeest Hashmi. While many other writers and thinkers in the Islamic world have produced works that articulate the embeddedness of the human within a semiotically active material world, including IbneSina, Al-Razi, Mahmoud Darwish and Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, to name but a few, the reason why we chose Hashmi's texts is because they abound with palpable instances of nonhuman material agency articulating itself across centuries. These instances are useful for us in drawing inferences regarding disanthropocentric conceptions of nonhuman agency, as evinced in Islamic epistemologies. Taking cue from the theories of material agency by Karen Barad, Jeremy Cohen and Timo Maran, we argue the ways in which Hashmi's works operate as textual fossils since they incorporate the stories of the material world in conjunction with those of the human world. Through a close reading of her texts, we foreground how her writings are textured with the Islamic conceptions of the natural world, its material agency and the narratives this agency yields in conjunction with the human.

1. Introduction

In his book *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, material ecocritic Jeffrey Jerome Cohen draws attention to the notion that narratives are "textual fossils" which operate like their "material counterparts", interacting with non-linguistic stories encoded in material forms (2015, pp. 102-103). As textual fossils, literary texts produce meanings in conjunction with the material world which, in a state of ongoing mutability, is engaged in an embodied semiotic dance.

Therefore, ecocritics today postulate a world based on alliances and “mutual participation” between human and nonhuman phenomena wherein the human is decentralised, thereby defying notions of “elemental solitariness and human exceptionalism” (Cohen 2015, p. 9). In so doing, they advocate a disanthropocentric approach towards reading the material narratives of the world which break down the hierarchically defined sense of segregation between humans and nonhumans. With this theoretical tilt in mind, in this paper we direct our gaze towards an exploration of the manifestations of material agency and its disanthropocentric hues in the writings of Pakistani anglophone writer Shadab Zeest Hashmi with particular emphasis on drawing out inferences regarding the portrayals of nonhuman material agency in the Islamic world. While many other writers and thinkers in the Islamic world have produced works that articulate the embeddedness of the human within a semiotically active material world, including Ibn Sina, Al-Razi, Mahmoud Darwish and Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, to name but a few, the reason why we chose Hashmi’s texts is because they abound with palpable instances of nonhuman material agency articulating itself across centuries. These instances are useful for us in drawing inferences regarding disanthropocentric conceptions of nonhuman agency, as evinced in Islamic epistemologies. Additionally, these depictions also permit a theorisation regarding how her works operate as textual fossils since they incorporate the stories of the material world in conjunction with those of the human world. Through a close reading of her texts, we foreground how her writings are textured with the Islamic conceptions of the natural world, its material agency and the narratives this agency yields in conjunction with the human.

The reason why we move in the direction of perceptions regarding material agency in the Islamic philosophical frameworks is because our forays in the area of material agency across different cultures have identified a crucial absence, that of readings of “vital materialism” (Bennett 2010, p. 31) and its manifestations in the works of Muslim writers. In order to address this gap, we use Hashmi’s works to launch an exploration into Islamic conceptions of material agency and its enmeshments with the human world. In her works, nonhuman voices are unmistakably audible as they traverse various Muslim cultures over the last 600 years, encapsulating areas spanning from Andalusia to the subcontinent. We argue that her works operate like textual fossils wherein material agency is both “generative” and “generous”. Being generative implies that material agency is producing new relations, perspectives and meanings whereby it is able to “intermix the disjunct”, thus becoming generous (Cohen 2015, p. 25). With this in mind, we use her work to draw inferences regarding how the disanthropocentric idea of material agency was integral to Muslim societies long before the West endeavoured to conceptualise human and nonhuman relations in non-hierarchical terms and flagged material agency as a mobile archive that is to be read in terms of interactivity and transcorporeal exchanges. Our main stance is that Hashmi’s writings express a uniquely Islamic worldview that is inherently inclusive of nonhuman entities as it draws attention to their material articulations. Through this inclusive approach, it

subverts the human/nonhuman, culture/nature binaries that have framed not only the Christian religious outlook but also shaped subsequent secular scientific approaches that affirm human exceptionalism and impose a disconnect between the human and his environment over the last six centuries (McLaughlin 2011; Clauson 2015; Lindberg and Roine 2021; 2010; Stehr 2000; Dant 2005; Reckwitz 2002).

In order to upend this binaristic approach, current debates in material ecocriticism emerging in the Euro-American world advocate the need to re-envision human and nonhuman embeddedness in terms of a disanthropocentric worldview. With the world on the verge of an ecological apocalypse, ecocritics in the West accuse these hierarchical human/nonhuman, culture/nature binaries for this disastrous outcome and therefore advocate disbanding them. However, what is being packaged and marketed as a ‘new’ discursive stance in the West is not altogether new in many other parts of the world where the human and the nonhuman spheres were never perceived as separate to begin with. Native American, Latin American as well as African literatures and cosmologies are replete with instances regarding the flows that shape human and nonhuman interactions, and an extensive research has already been conducted in these areas. However, even as these cultures and cosmologies advocate an indisputably disanthropocentric approach towards human and nonhuman enmeshments, we argue that Islamic epistemologies and cultures also envision a world wherein the human is invited to ‘listen’ and to ‘pay heed’ to nonhuman voices instead of ignoring them out of anthropocentric *hubris*.

In line with this argument, we establish a dialogue between contemporary theorisations of human-nonhuman embeddedness, as exemplified in the works of Karen Barad, Cohen and Timo Maran with articulations of material agency in Hashmi’s writings. Operating in the domain of onto-epistemological enmeshments across multiple assemblages, embodied matter and abstract ideas operate as “interchangeable isotopes in a chemical brew” or entangled agencies (Barad 2007, p. 6). When viewed through this lens, the human and the nonhuman lose their discrete boundaries so that human “knowledge-making practices” are indelibly interwoven within the “social-material” world (Barad 2007, p. 26). In this postulation Barad finds an ally in Cohen’s notion of lithic agency according to which stones as agents do not only contour the landscape but are in a constant alliance with the human. From building graves out of stone to constructing huge edifices, stones have acted as scrolls encoding a “burgeoning of story, a dense and propulsive archive” (Cohen 2015, p. 21) as they carry the imprints of natural and man-made catastrophes. Other nonhuman phenomena ranging from celestial bodies to miniscule specks of sand, are just as intimately entangled with the human world. These theoretical stances resonate with the manifestations of multiple tropes in Hashmi’s *Ghazal Cosmopolitan* and *Baker of Tarifa Poems* which present nonhuman entities functioning as knowledge generating entangled agencies and a generative archive of stories.

On the basis of her writings, we have categorised these tropes as artefacts, scents, wooden sculptures, culinary ingredients, celestial bodies like the sun, plants, fragrances, fabrics, musical instruments such as a *rubab*, exquisite manuscripts and art canvases that speak across multiple “visual and sonic fields” (Hashmi 2017, p. 6). Through these tropes what is foregrounded is the enmeshment of a multitude of nonhuman phenomena both within and outside the human, so that both agents reciprocally articulate the saga of the changing times and cultures thereby making this conception intrinsic to Muslim culture. As her poetry and prose drip with succulent cultural allusions to the socio-cultural richness of the Muslim world, her writings operate like a literary cuisine as they depict a world wherein all elements are bound in an unimpeded intimacy. Matter in the form of food, colours and textures dissolves in the solvent of her language and memory as effortlessly as sugar in *sherbet*, creating a rich blend that revives the flavours of Islamic cultures and places. Her collections reflect the inclusive narrative of ongoing creativity generated by material forms and human creations, scripting a synesthetic narrative of unalterable inseparability. The culture/nature binary is alien to the world she encapsulates since both are bound in oneness and it is this oneness of the created world that is at the core of Islamic sensibilities. She is thus articulating what is essential to Islamic onto-epistemology: the notion that matter and language, the human and the nonhuman are wedded to each other. In her works, textual resonances carry a “corporeal power” (Cohen 2015, p. 97). They illustrate the crucial influence of the human mind on material bodies as they are sculpted into artefacts. In so doing, they also draw attention to the manner in which the material world influences the human mind in terms of the former’s material potential to act as a conveyance device for relaying meanings. Both are thus semiotized in the process. Here, Maran’s theorisation provides useful support which does not only blur the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, but also foregrounds how the latter generates its own signs that coalesce in varying combination with the human “semiotic realm” (Maran 2014, p. 149).

This semiotic realm also penetrates within the human body that, according to Maran, is composed of multiple semiotic layers or “sub-selves” that enact their own agency and meanings to constitute the collective human “semiotic self” (2019, p. 289). Multiple human organs, ranging from the cellular to the multicellular, all operate as sub-selves in constant communication with each other so that any aberration in any component compels the body to react. For instance, the induction of a virus catalyses the production of antibodies that send signals to the immune system to deactivate the foreign pathogens which in turn communicate with each other at the molecular level to assert an autonomous selfhood. Colours, scents and landforms evoke a plethora of sensations such as delight, nostalgia, awe, inspiration and sadness and many others, all of which contribute towards enabling humans to analyse their embeddedness within the malleable material world. This is precisely how material entities operate in Hashmi’s collections. As semiotic agents, they recall the history and memories of a rich Islamic heritage that is imprinted

within the very materiality of the land and its culture. Thus, in the Muslim world that she projects, matter most manifestly matters.

2. *Baker of Tarifa and Ghazal Cosmopolitan: Mediating Material Agency*

Hashmi's key work *Baker of Tarifa* encompasses material depictions of the legacy of Muslim rule in Spain, ranging from the lush gardens and grand architecture of Andalusia to the evocations of its air permeated with fragrant flavours that waft through time to tantalise the contemporary reader. On the other hand, her book *Ghazal Cosmopolitan* is redolent with articulations of flavours, sights, sounds and textures of rich Islamic cultures spanning across the Middle East, Central and South Asia. Hashmi conjures the "Ghosts of Al Andalus" during her stay in Cordoba's Juderia near the Mezquita-Cathedral and in Alhamra, she finds "ancient faces [that] are embedded in pillars. Sketched in rust they bleed into each other. These ghosts of Al Andalus come on rich wafts of tannin ink and pomegranate pulp, or poised between *oud* strings — vibrato of a dream. They leap from a basin of mercury to the high filigreed domes" (Hashmi 2010, p. 3; Emphasis in Original). As is indicated here, dead people, histories, colours and sounds all coalesce to create the symphony of the golden age of Al Andalus. Imprints of this past are embedded in the materiality of the land and of its people. "[S]cribes, stonemasons, merchants, seamstresses, philosophers, gardeners and governors. They plant, they write books. They build, and make bread" (Hashmi 2010, pp. 3). In this world "[b]ones are cradles for memories" (Hashmi 2010, p. 43). Planting, writing, cooking and every other activity involves playing with matter, shaping it and being shaped by it. Thus, matter remains the canvas on which Muslim traditions are inscribed and transmitted across time and it is this canvas that Hashmi's writings play with and is of particular interest to us. In her work, material inscriptions retain a loquacity as they articulate the mystical and the magical aspects of these bygone times. Words and matter become one, flowing into each other. Persian, Urdu or English, Hashmi's collections are written in an "ink bearing the musk of many lands" encapsulating a "lavishly diverse heritage". In so doing, they coalesce diverse "sensibilities of parched deserts and spectacular night skies, rugged mountains, finely cultivated gardens, steppes, monsoons" (2017, p. 3). Her voice and the voices of the material world align with each other in a transtemporal chorus.

This is evident in the trope of light that radiates across her writings. Hashmi's poetic collection indubitably immerses the readers within what Kate Rigby calls "the visual and energetic spectrum of light's energy" (qtd. in Iovino and Oppermann 2014, p. 81). This extraordinarily vibrant more-than-human environment reminds us of the fact that natural world is a dynamic "self-generative unity-in-diversity" (qtd. in Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 82). For example, in *Baker of Tarifa*, when she captures "the lilac on the glass" as her soul and dreams of "copper sands clean-slate blue starlight", she binds the body, nature and colours in differential entanglements. In so doing, the human body is shown to have co-emerged with nature instead of taking the position of

an observer. Similarly, in her poem “Marzipan Roses in the Monastery”, when Hashmi imagines the way “Saffron in the paste gives it the colour of the horizon in summer” (2010, p. 13), she sees colours as “representative for nature’s fluctuating processes” (Iovino and Oppermann, 2014, p. 81).

This interdependency and coexistence take another twist in her poem “Maria de La Luz Finds Joseph the Book Merchant” in which she dwells on the shared existence of self, cosmos and nature:

My name he says means light

So he read to me about planets catching starlight (2010, p. 21)

This mesh of the human and celestial sphere, quintessentially depicting light’s energy, not only reminds us of the light of Heaven and earth but also gestures towards fuzzy boundaries between human bodies and non-human phenomena. This interesting juxtaposition of the metaphor of light in relation to human and planets (catching starlight) corroborates Barad’s notion that bodies and things and energy ‘intra-act’, instead of interact.

This dynamic relationship is also captured in the poem “Mosaic”.

The sun’s brash mirror

has fissures

Longing

at this latitude

becomes lambent

Piercing together in the middle of the earth (2010, p. 53)

This conversation between the earth and the sun in the form of the unbounded celestial energy emanating from the sun’s brash mirror to nurture the earth demonstrates how Hashmi’s poem becomes a space where several entities combine to form a narrative of unalterable inseparability, as is evident in another poem “Invasion” in which there is a commingling of self and nature when the poet imagines “the moon...[her] own raw self, slipping out of the impossible blue mist, dropping into your gaze whole” (2010, p. 23). In so doing, the spatial distinction between human and the biosphere is blurred. Material entities within her work therefore articulate themselves via a corporeal power interweaving individual human stories with the material world of entangled agencies. The human and the nonhuman thereby operate as co-constitutive archive of stories.

Matter in her world aggregates, stores, retrieves and generates information. Its semiotic potential coalesces with the human semiotic realm to manifest its own energy as it forms meaning-loaded knots with her literary articulations, thereby reflecting the human and the nonhuman as co-authoring each other. There are always portholes which open up points of intersection between the human world and the world of agentic matter. Architectural motifs perform precisely this function in her poetry. The performative dimension of architectural objects in *Baker of Tarifa* explicates what Doucet and Cupers conceptualise as “architecture’s ‘earthly’ entanglements ... harnessing the multifarious notion of agency” (2009, p. 2). There is an extraordinary abundance of windows in Hashmi’s collection which connect the reader with diverse landscapes, whether it is the world of Granada, “thrown open” by windows, “Window in La Madraza”, the “Window in the Tower of the Seven Floors Boabdil’s Lament” or “Window Open to Plaza de Bab-Al-Ramla”. The windows in these tend to focus on the perceptual presence of the places that inform poet’s encounters and experiences of the respective landscapes. Her Ghazal entitled “Window” becomes a compelling metaphor for hope, hauntings, wisdom, and “mind’s endless music”, all mediated through the window. Significantly, the windows unravel the capacities of human bodies to act in spaces by communicating “across obliterating sweeps of time; and tracing the temporal knot formed when distant history touches present story, since to narrate the past conjures possible futures” (Cohen 2015, p. 78). No wonder then that the places such as Cordoba or Al Andalus, in Hashmi’s poetry, are populated by ghosts of surprising intimacies who “have clung ever since” and refuse “to leave until [she] hear[s] them out” (2010, p. 3). This historical ebb and flow of dynamic spaces from the past in Hashmi’s work articulates an ontology in which other-than-human entities and objects also possess soul and agency. They are perceived as alive in the world as human beings. It is precisely against this backdrop that we read Hashmi’s poetry as “textual fossils” which operate in conjunction with their “material counterparts”, producing non-linguistic stories encoded in material forms.

Foregrounding the agency of material culture, “Qasida of the Railroad Garden” offers tantalising insights into mystical world of gardens that “will grow, maroon leaves, sweet peas, birches, unabashed green filling the metal where men left pockmarked ghosts of the bolted down longing” (2017, p. 102). It is interesting to see how birches, leaves and peas are involved in caring atonement. The human exploitative and destructive forces are replaced by blissful garden, thereby demonstrating a reflexive interactivity between nature, human, matter and mind which emphasises the agency of the inhuman, as Cohen says: “When matter exerts its right to be the protagonist of its own story, epistemological frames shift, a Copernican revolution with multiple realignments” (2015, p. 39). Another material entity that ‘speaks’ in her writings is that of food. Participating in the drama of human relations that cross religious biases and unravel common humanity at its very core, food and flavours act as the great equalizers eradicating differences as they satiate all human bodies, Jewish, Muslim or Christian, equally. In her poem “Window

Overlooking the Furn”, the pregnant dough dreams; there is a pulse in oil and semolina, indicating a warmth of kinship that refuses to be ontologically segregated. Matter is as pregnant with life and expectation as the human world that chimes in with echoes of human laughter (Hashmi 2010, p. 6). Flavours, textures and fragrances coalesce in camaraderie as descriptions of food unravel stories of co-evolution. As flour, brown sugar, butter, almonds and pistachios blend into a scrumptious recipe, the flavours evoked do not only activate the reader’s taste buds but also memories of a rich world wherein human connections were mediated through delectable foods. In *Ghazal Cosmopolitan*, memories of this world are conveyed through rich flavours that melt on the writer’s tongue, unwrapping not only memories but also an intimacy between the richness encoded in all human languages and the language that matter speaks:

And now, here again, as I sip the sherbet and take in the names of various fruits, roots, herbs and flowers grown and known first in China, India, Persia, the Mediterranean, or Central Asia, passed on over the centuries across the networks of trade routes stretching from China to Europe, combined in an imperial drink, I also take in the singular flavor of hybridity leading to the synesthesia underlying language, Isn’t ‘Anar’ the jeweled fruit of miniature painting and proverbs, a startling red with ‘nar,’ the Arabic word for fire in it, and ‘Anar kali’, the fruit’s bud in Urdu, a cultural motif signifying beauty? And ‘ruman’, Arabic for pomegranate, also the word for ‘romance’ in Urdu, though likely from the Latin root of ‘Rome’ (2017, pp. 7-8)

Like the gardens mentioned earlier, here food both linguistically and materially recalls the glory of Al-Andalus under Muslim rule, wherein the very materiality of the world spoke of the script of unity, across religions, cultures and matter. The environment speaks of cohesion in this world of entangled intimacies, a cohesion that has become hard to imagine and even harder to achieve in today’s conflict-stricken world. As memories translated in ink are inscribed on vellum while carrying the aroma of sappy fruits in *Baker of Tarifa*, the world is read like a textual fossil, a semiotized entity where in material entities flow into each other in intimate communion, thereby embodying the cross-cultural unity and glory that was the hallmark of Muslim Spain.

In Hashmi’s poetry, humans semiotize matter and are semiotized in return. This is because “semiotized matter embodies the imprint of the organism or culture that has created it” (Maran 2014, p. 151). These imprints continue to travel across time, entering new adventures in new temporalities through “significant surfacings or comings into agency” reiterating themselves in different forms throughout the ages. (Cohen 2015, p. 55). It is precisely this ethos with its allusions to polychronic material agency that reverberates in the works of many Muslim writers like Hashmi. Matter coalesces discordant stories, forging new relations “conjoining things in ways productive and perilous” (Cohen 2015, p. 35). In her aptly titled poem “Ghazal: Tangle” the metaphor of the flame

coalesces disparate histories bringing together two entirely different epistemologies. Alluding to the all-revealing mystical flame in the female mystic Rabia Basri's sufi writing and blending it into the bomb that blew up Napoleon Bonaparte's battleship *L'Orient*, the same flame entangles and conjoins the disparate stories of Basri and Bonaparte, transmuting from the light that reveals the mysteries of the all-knowing Divine into a force of destruction participating in the historical saga of Bonaparte's defeat. At the same time, the flame enacts the syncretic history of Egypt, commingling its spiritual and political inheritances. And yet, the same flame then crosses this boundary to become a participant in the heartbreak of a contemplative Hashmi, thereby forging new relations:

Strange, the flame in Rabia Basri's metaphor became Napoleon's bomb in Cairo

This Sufi's heaven burned when the library burned; metaphor in a state of tangle

You pour a cup of chai, Zeest, then another and another to thaw a frozen love

That summer garden was a figment. Its floral pendants: dead weight in a tangle (Hashmi 2017, p. 94).

Metamorphosing from a source of illumination to a destructive weapon, the flame ultimately becomes the elements to thaw a frozen heart that realizes the garden it is awakening to was never more than an illusion. The flame thus establishes a dynamic relationality amongst the disparate and disconnected. It is a catalytic flow that inaugurates new meanings and stories that express the underlying catalytic flows establishing connections across multiplicities via a "transversal movement" that crosses narrative thresholds (Deleuze and Guattari 1985, p. 25). The human is no longer the sole narrator of the history that Hashmi foregrounds; rather it is matter that opens up the route to a "disanthropocentric path" as it formulates "generative relations" (Cohen 2015, pp. 41-43) across time and regions.

Participating in these generative relations are also stones and rocks as they inscribe the end of Muslim rule in Spain; the debris of the fallen minaret, symbolising this end, transmutes into gems that are to adorn the crown of the triumphant Isabella. However, even as the wheel of time rotates, the material world, acting as a textual fossil, retains the inscriptions of these bygone times. Matter becomes a historian par excellence as a silken cloth carrying the inscription "La Ghalibilla Allah" — which means 'there's no greater conqueror than Allah' — is seen "suturing" the broken rocks of a building that was at the core of the Muslim way of life. The rock and the silk simply enunciates the idea that civilizations rise and fall, yet they continue to bear testament to an immutable higher divine reality that remains permanent. These material agents bring into play a spirituality that goes beyond politicised religion.

Cities and places also operate as repositories of multiple narratives interweaving scents and sounds, textures and colour. In so doing, through what Cohen terms as “geochoreography” (Cohen 2015, pp. 188) which involves “patterns of intra-action [because] cities are compounds of matter and energy in mutual transformation with human and nonhuman beings, living and nonliving matter” (Iovino 2014, p. 102). In the poem titled “Sultana Moraima Descends the Hill of Sebeka”, Grenada “inked pomegranate” while her blood ran through the silk the city produced. One notices a blurring of ontological boundaries as vermilion blood blends into the pomegranate hue that streaks through Granada’s architectural marvels such as La Mezquita and its floral landscaped dappled with red and fuschia. And yet the chromatography does not end there. The red of the landscape blends into the red of blood that is shed when Moraima, the last princess of Granada, is exiled and her two year old son is held captive by Isabella. One may also assume that the red recalls the blood she lost in giving birth to the child now gone as well as menstrual blood staining the dress made of Granada’s finest silk. Humans, fabrics, fluids, dyes, flowers and architecture all perform a geochoreographic dance across porous boundaries blending the abysmal sense of loss of a mother, a deposed queen and a lost city.

At the same time, material agency also operates as a story teller that brings to the fore the flow of human civilizations from the land of Ur to the Yellow River in China and the “great granary of Indus” (Hashmi 2010, p. 56). Humans, landscapes, art and architecture all reveal the unbreakable unity underlying God’s creation. All stand semiotised in the narrative of evolution, etching traces of multiple pasts. In Hashmi’s writings material agency as embedded in artistic forms reveals a world where it is the human who is evading permanence. The world of matter on the other hand continues to be the canvas on which humans have inscribed their traces:

I had painted you

Mahogany; rich, impenetrable.

With each brush-stroke, the wood seemed ready and more ready

For the crawling of worms in the rain, for the resting of hill-mynas

And sand-coloured birds in springtime.

The lilac on the glass was my soul,

Dusty, vulnerable (Hashmi 2010, p.57; Emphasis in Original).

And yet, at the same time, the painting that also acts as a window opening the outer world in all its decay and the inner world of the narrator navigates between the two domains. But the perfect “craggy” world this “composition in lint, in eel slime” brings forth through its “phantom ink” is that it is the human that brings peace to the world which can either be seen as a suffocating Eden

concealing the serpent of lust and desire or as a mystical garden “where peace is what the gazer must bring to it constantly”. The material canvas, its colour palette and ink become the medium through which revelation comes to the human. In doing so, it projects the human self as a process on its way of becoming. The medium of colour and paint are pregnant with the same force as the humans, signifying not just the human lives but also “the forms and metamorphoses of more-than-human life” (Zapf 2014, p. 64). In so doing, they present a semiotic dance where matter and the human continue to shape each other trying to extract sense out of the complex mesh of life.

3. Conclusion

No wonder then that Hashmi’s work with its focus on the relationship between human and non-human has clear implications for reorienting our relations to vitality of nature. Her writings uniquely express an Islamic worldview that is inherently inclusive of more-than-human entities, thereby, reinforcing the disanthropocentric idea of material agency. Through this inclusive approach, her work subverts the human/nonhuman, culture/nature binaries that have framed not only the Christian religious outlook but also shaped subsequent secular scientific approaches that affirm human exceptionalism and impose a disconnect between the human and his environment over the last six centuries. Her work clearly participates in theorising the notion of vital materiality in Islamic context and in so doing situates Pakistani anglophone literary tradition within the global discourses surrounding material cultural phenomena.

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