

CULTURAL POLITICS AND IDENTITY CRISIS: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF SHAFAK'S *HONOUR*

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at investigating the issues of cultural politics and identity crisis through the psychoanalytic study of Shafak's (2013) "Honour" under the theoretical framework of Nancy Chodorow's (1978) "The Reproduction of Mothering." From the beginning of the world there are issues of cultural politics and identity crisis. Shafak's work under discussion encounters the traditional rigid beliefs which create cultural differences between men and women. These cultural differences and politics have raised many questions of identity. The researchers attempt to examine the cultural politics and pejorative state of identity crisis under the psychoanalytic perspective as to how the writer, Shafak, dismantles the dogmatic beliefs prevailing in a traditional male chauvinistic society, and how do women face identity crisis which lead them to their mental annihilation. The researcher inspects how the cultural binaries are sewed in the psyche of a person from his childhood. This research proposes the significance of the cultural politics and identity crisis in psychoanalytic perspective.

Keywords: Cultural politics, Identity Crisis, Traditional beliefs, male chauvinistic society, Psychoanalysis.

INTRODUCTION

From the time immemorial, since the inception of human civilization, there have been problematical concerns regarding culture, sexuality and rigid beliefs, which have risen position of world's systems, philosophies and beliefs. As the human life goes ahead, every single era or age has presented its own viewpoint and speculative perspectives. Our commonly or universally acknowledged traditions, principles, religious paradigms and literature are affected by these philosophies and theoretical perceptions. Psychoanalysis, instead of ignoring these assumptions, reconsiders these traditional practices. To systemize the world mandate, one of the traditional conventions is the creation of cultural politics. Psychoanalysis approach is related to psychoanalytic view of the core cultural and dispositional issues.

Psychoanalysis describes women's identity crisis as rooted within psychic construction and strengthened by the repetition of interpersonal movement formed since early childhood. One of the basic purpose of the term is that psychoanalysts desired to alter the experiences of early family relations, as well as linguistic forms that reinforce masculinity and femininity. Critique of Freudian and Non-Freudian concepts is related to women and their biological, psychical, and moral subordination to men. The psychoanalysts address the political and social issues that are affecting the outgrowth of both gender subjects. Like major feminists, they also observe sexual unlikeness and women's *otherness* as a key issues in kindred to men.

Later feminist appropriations of Freud censure the "traditional" family makeups in which primarily women mother assume other care-taking responsibilities. In his work, Chodorow

(1978), for instance, discusses that distinctive experiences in early stages of women and son in the direction of changed developing routes, with sons who are splitting with their mothers to identify the father's social bravery and for the mother's growth of girls are more constant sense of self in relatives. Girls have a closer relation with their mothers, it creates some fluid mental limitations that facilitates a better capability for familiarity, but it leaves a path organized to transfer the public spheres. Chodorow (1978) and former other items associations theorists supported twofold parenting idea to eradicate the characteristic illogical inequalities that are produced by cultural extremists, as children would be able to outlook ancestors and individuals in relationship, know-how of manhood and women are self and other-oriented, and vista both genders are populating both private and public fields.

The text of Shafak's (2013) *Honour* illustrates these issues of cultural politics and identity crisis as a whole. *Honour*, a Turkish-Kurdish family saga system in London, proceeds Shafak into new literary zone. The novel follows three generations of the Turkish-Kurdish Toprak family from Istanbul and the Euphrates to London, and the codes of honour which bind and interlude them. This is an extraordinarily skillfully crafted and ambitious narrative, with Shakespearean twists and turns, omens and enigmas, forecast and destinies fulfilled. It weaves time and place: from working-class Istanbul in 1954 to a small Kurdish village by the Euphrates in 1962, Hackney in 1977, and Abu Dhabi and Shrewsbury prison in the 1990s. We are introduced to three creations of the family including Naze, the mother of twins Pembe Kader (Pink Destiny) and Jamila Yeter (Enough Beauty). Adem loves the latter and marries the former, in the name of honour. Pembe and Adem's children are rebellious teenagers: Iskender, would-be scribe and feminist Esma, and dreamy seven-year-old Yunus. The whole story revolves around the female characters and their oppression through so-called *honour* which leads them to a great family disaster.

The researchers investigate how and in which respects Shafak's *Honour* speaks for cultural identity and how they face cultural politics and identity crisis from generation to generation, in a traditional patriarchal society under the theoretical framework of *The Reproduction of Mothering* enunciated by Nancy Chodorow.

Statement of the Problem

Cultural Politics and identity crisis are the fundamental concerns in psychoanalytic process. These concerns explore various shapes of cultural politics which create male chauvinism in Turkish-Kurdish culture. These problems point out the politics of cultures which set different boundaries for men and women, and locate men like kings oppressing women. Even there are restrictions on women's thinking. They don't have speech freedom. Every culture is proficient in this type of women suppression and subservience. Therefore, this research investigates how the cultural dogmatic beliefs prevail in the society, and how do women face problems which take them to their identity crisis.

The study finds out how cultural binaries are sewed in the psyche of a person from his childhood, and how these issues of cultural politics and identity crisis are presented in this novel of Shafak in respective of Turkish – Kurdish context.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research were to:

- dismantle dogmatic beliefs in a traditional male prejudiced society.
- identify the elements of cultural politics and identity crisis, which lead them to their mental annihilation.

- find out that the reproduction of mothering psychologically creates a gender division in a patriarchal society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Researchers attempted to find out answers to the following questions.

- 1- How does the writer Shafak dismantle the dogmatic beliefs prevailing in a traditional male prejudiced society in the light of *Honour*?
- 2- How do women face cultural politics and identity crisis, which lead them to their mental annihilation in *Honour*?
- 3- How does the *reproduction of mothering* psychologically generate a gender division in a patriarchal society?
- 4- How do cultural differences between men and women are sewed in a psyche of a person relating identity from his childhood in *Honour*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of literary works and research studies on the cultural politics and feminine personality have been attempted in Eastern contexts. The present psychoanalytic study of the novel may be different in its expression. In Eastern background if we observe, we discover Kishwar Naheed. Her fortification like *We Sinful Women* is true execution of declination of traditional practices of subjugated bodies, against the universal binary realities of men/women. She writes, "It is we sinful women/who come out raising the banner of truth." Here, we find the change of differences as in this men/ women, truth/falsehood, a woman considered in negative and unprivileged strata represents herself as the preacher of the truism which is kept at higher level which the manhood belongs to. Naheed's further poems e.g. *A Palace of Wax*, *Anticlockwise* and *Censorship* encounter the cultural politics and identity crisis generated by the patriarchs.

Likewise, Das' (1996) poetry also identify woman's uniqueness free of cultural politics and identity crisis. But, the themes of release and reliance on male dominant figure intersect. She confesses the strength and the valor of the manly characteristics. Her poems like *The Looking Glass from The Descendants*, the writer suggests female to give those things to men as 'What makes you woman'. The things and desires which are considered as taboos are supposed to give, the "musk of sweat between breasts/the warm shocks of menstrual blood" (p. 14).

Moreover, if we observe other women writers who speak for identity and raise voice against cultural partiality include Durrani (1991) in her memoir *My Feudal Lord* depicts cultural politics and identity crisis. She portrayed the derogatory and oppressive state of women, and interpreted their lives in a traditional male chauvinistic society. It discusses all the aspects cultural politics, binaries, differences and issues of identity crisis which demonstrate women's tyrannical situation in Pakistan. While talking about *My Feudal Lord*, she states that "The book is a milestone for the cause of women in Pakistan. It should be recognized as a stepping stone for women, who are mothers, sisters, wives and daughters". (Shree, 2002). We discover that feudal lord Mustafa Khar does not give permission to contact to her siblings. Khar plays the actual role of a patriarch and of an oppressor as well as a violent man. Even his old mother was not free of his oppression. Whenever Durrani wanted to get rid of this unjust situation she was cruelly beaten by Khar. Durrani argues, "Later in our bedroom, my insolence was punished with yet another sharp slap. He called me an exhibitionist, a woman without shame" (Durrani, 1995).

Sidhwa's (1983) *The Bride* is also a depiction identity crisis. She condemned the viciousness of tribal enigmas of Honors and merciless customs. Sidhwa deconstructed the cultural politics where men as fathers, husbands, sons are the producers of every kind of rules. The concepts of Honor, Shame, and Social position all are concerned with women. Men are free from such moral and religious ties. So *the Bride* is representation of passion, lust, murder, violence, power and sensuality. There are separate moral codes for women to behave in a society. Sidhwa says, "Women get killed for one reason or other...imagined insults, family honors, infidelity..." (Sidhwa, 1990). *The Pakistani Bride* is a story of three brides Zaitoon, Carol and Afshan. Carol loves Farukh but due to his self-centered and male chauvinistic insolence builds a gap between them. Carol shows attraction towards Major Mushtaq, when she feels betrayed she again wants to resolve with Farukh but society's so called honorable and ethical norms for women force her to think about Farukh's response. Perplexed by her assumed thoughts she asks Mushtaq, "Do you think Farukh would kill me? Mushtaq answers, "Who knows? I might, if you were my wife". (p. 224). There are different attitudes for males and females, if a woman deserves punishment for disloyalty or extra marital affair then why not a man. Because a man is equal blamable for this act.

Culture and tradition has a big role in the construction of cultural politics and identity crisis. Culture forms the gender roles, gender dynamics, gender expectations as well as gender positions of supremacy and subservience. The social performances, beliefs and attitudes of their native country, overlapping with their new social practices, beliefs and norms of the immigrant population diaspora in London especially gender roles, gender politics and structure of masculinities and femininities etc.

Cultural violence is not some marginalized, exotic "cultural practices" that takes place somewhere else. It is the culturally embedded practice and assumption of dominance over women in virtually all societies, and general acceptance of violence as a means of maintaining that control, even of defending one's masculinity. Rather than label some practices as cultural or traditional forms of violence, we need to understand that all violence against women is supported by cultural attitude, at least as long as culture –one's family, community, friends, colleagues and religion –generally accept it...All human right work involves changing culture and must be shaped by the specificities of each culture to be effective in doing so" (Bunch).

Charlotte's perceptions are beneficial in a way that cultural politics and identity must be changed culturally as well as socially. Men use psychological and special techniques to control their women, the ways in which women are incapable to convert the control and independence. They are bound to be influenced by the culture and culturally informed gender roles and attitudes.

Other writers (like Maya Angleou and Sylvia Plath etc.) from the other corners of the world also raise their voices against these issues; Maya Angleou's Poem *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Alice Walkers' poem *Be Nobody's Darling*. Here both poets quest for their own separate identity and emission from the social and political dogmas of the human society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study has been carried out through qualitative research method. The researchers find out significant features of cultural politics and identity crisis through the psychoanalytic study of Shafak's *Honour*. Chodorow discusses that social dealings are the foundation of our identity and subjectivity. Unlike Jacques Lacan, she highlights that independence is not generated

from within, but rather from without, from the experience of connecting, separating, and reconnecting with others.

This study helps the researchers to examine the other writings in a relevance of manner. The researchers also compare this poetic confrontation of works by using online journals, books and articles. For this purpose, different texts of the concerned writers and library sources are used. Conceptual framework is used for further analysis of the data. After that the findings and conclusions and recommendations have been made. This textual study unveils men's hegemony and the wicked nature of cultural politics. By narrating her tale author interrogates the cultural mindsets and politics that give a man enough space for extramarital affairs and infidelity, but do not permit a woman even to show her feelings. This study has raised voice for the young Turkish women living in a culture which treats a son as a king and a girl as oppressed one. Moreover, this research discloses the cultural political conspiracies against women which oppress their identities.

ANALYSIS

Theory of psychoanalysis provides a platform for the theory of social reproduction. Social reproduction is the basis for personality development and the development of psychic structure and as well as differential elements of gender personality. Psychoanalysts draw attention towards child's early experience in society. They argue that personality development is the result of what a child, in his early experiences of family, appropriates, internalizes and organizes. According to Chodorow when we reinterpret psychoanalytic development of male and female, we come to a result that women's mothering is responsible for the developmental theory of reproduction. Object-relations and psychic effects in men and women reproduced by women's mothering.

This narrative introduced us with the story of culturally fragmented three generations, *Berzo* and *Naze*; *Pembe* and *Adem Toprak*; and *Iskander*, *Esmâ* and *Yunus Toprak*. Starting from Turkish-Kurdish Toprak family *Naze*, mother of *Pembe Kader* means 'Pink Destiny' and *Jamila Kader* means 'Enough Beauty' to London. The central theme of the novel reveals the tradition/culture which has been focused on the belief that male psychology is bound to the preservation of the family honours. The whole story revolves around the female characters especially mothers and children. A male character 'Adem' who loves Jamila but due to so called family 'Honour', he marries *Pembe* and they have three rebellious children. The entire tale depicts the state of all characters that how they are sewed in the web of society's so called Honour system which lead them to identity crisis and an unforgettable family disaster.

Shafak has make known to us this with an anecdote as:

When I was seven years old, we lived in a green house. One of our neighbors, a talented tailor, would often beat his wife. In the evening we listened to the shouts, the cries, the swearing. In the morning we went on our lives as usual. The entire neighborhood pretended not to have heard, not to have seen.

This novel is dedicated to those who hear, those who see (Shafak, 2013).

Therefore, *Honour* basically has dealt with the themes of cultural politics and identity crisis which lead them to their mental annihilation. It draws our attention to this serious problem as how it matters when an immigrant has apparently escaped from all traditions and conventions but they all are still prevailing within them traditionally as well as psychologically. Briefly Shafak has presented us a clear picture of a double standard culture. A culture where a man is all in all, he can do anything that he wants, even he can have an extra marital affair with one after the other, unluckily for which again wife is responsible for not keeping her husband home. But a woman is subordinated. She cannot do anything without the permission of man.

She has no right to love another man, even a woman cannot have right to express her wish openly. Holloway McCandless reviewed that “Honour manages to be diverting and full of life while simultaneously analyzing the durability of violent cultural traditions” (Brown, n.d.)

Whole Kurdish family represents the patriarchal and traditional codes. We can examine these values and codes throughout the novel which are twisted in the family. *Pembe*, who is the prey of these honour codes, herself is portrayed patriarchal values. *Esma*, *Pembe*'s daughter admits that *Pembe* has borrowed words from Grandma *Naze*. *Esma* criticizes that *Pembe* has an imbalanced attitudes and behaviors towards female sexuality:

We had been very close, me and my mother, but all that changed the moment my breasts started to bud and I had my first period. The only thing she was interested in now was my virginity [...] Not once had she told me about what was possible and permissible; her powers of communication were reserved solely for rules and prohibitions. [...] Yet she did not impose the same rules on my brothers. Yunus was still too little, perhaps, but with Iskander she was totally different, open. Iskander did not need to be careful. He could just be himself. No holds barred (shafak, 2013, p. 184).

This is the example of how the novel reveals that honour codes which have been deeply rooted in the cultural building of the family, and woman has an authoritative role for maintaining these codes. In the same culture and family, there are different perspectives on honour which have an influence on an individual's attitude.

Naze tells her daughters even the division of colors for men and women, by which she distinguishes between them. As she says that,

It was all because women made of the lighter cambric, *Naze* continued, whereas men were cut of thick, dark fabric. That is how God has tailored the two: one superior to the other. As to why He had done that, it was not up to human beings to question. What mattered was that the colour black did not show stains, unlike the colour white, which revealed even the tiniest speck of dirt. By the same token, women who were sullied would be instantly noticed and separated from the rest, like husks removed from grains. Hence when a virgin gave herself to a man – even if he were the man whom she loved – she had everything to lose, while he had absolutely nothing to lose (p. 16).

This is how figure of mother takes part in the construction of culture and family, and maintains these above mentioned codes oh honour. Shafak narrates that

So it was that in the land where Pink Destiny and Enough Beauty were born, ‘honour’ was more than a word. It was also a name. You should call your child ‘Honour’, as long as it was a boy. Men had honour. Old men, middle-aged men, even schoolboys so young that they still smelled of their mother's milk. Women did not have honour. Instead, they had shame. And, as everyone know, Shame would be a rather poor name to bear. (p. 16)

In another chapter, ‘Disgrace’ in London, 5 January 1978, when Tariq (Adem's elder brother) knows about *Pembe*'s job. He says about his wife that “he would never allow her to work in a distant place among strangers, the way Adem let *Pembe*. It just was not right. Unless there was a financial crisis, a woman should not have to look for a job” (p. 151). It's a prejudiced behavior of men about women. They cannot see/tolerate a woman who has a spirit of doing something for herself and her children. They cannot accept that a woman can run a house without a man. And this type of philosophy is generated from the very childhood of an

individual. Children see their parents and their actions, and when they become parents they follow the path of their ancestors. When Tariq and his wife *Meral* discuss about *Pembe*, *Tariq* says that “what do you expect, if she’s not woman enough to keep her husband home...” (p. 153). We can notice that if a woman’s husband leaves home for another woman, then society blames his wife of not capable of keeping her husband home. This is undeniable fact that in every situation whether woman is right or wrong, she is considered blameful. *Tariq* furthers that “Men were mistaken when they coveted attractive women. They could flirt with them in their bachelor days, but a spouse ought to have attributes other than good looks” (153).

Through this novel *Honour*, *Shafak* has highlighted critical issues cultural politics and identity crisis dominantly. By creating a web of characters, she unveils the traditional dogmatic beliefs and values which rule over human’s lives. She has tried to free people who are surrounded by their past mistakes, and provides them a chance to live their lives on their own, instead of following societal/cultural rigid standards. Additionally, she draws our attention to dilemma of each society especially Turkish-Kurdish culture, where honour is everything. Honour is more important than the pleasure/gladness of a human being.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the researcher concludes that *Shafak* has uncovered the honour codes which have been deeply rooted in the psyche of every person from his/her childhood. It is said that a person’s psyche never changes with time, rather he goes to any part of the world or how much he becomes modern. One day or the other he will show his mentality/psyche. Similarly, *Toprak* family left Turkey and migrated to London forever, but they carried with them their traditions and beliefs which were also penetrated into the blood of their children. And these traditions and honour codes transferred through the medium of women’s mothering. It is the woman who narrates her children that what is good and bad. Mother’s lap is the first school for the child.

Therefore, the researchers find out that Cultural Politics has a big role in creating identity crisis for an individual. The constructed politics have affected women more than men. So they are more dispossessed of their basic rights. If a male partner has left home for another woman, then his female partner should have freedom of expression, i.e. she can choose anything in her life what she wants. *Shafak* has directly opposed these types of politics which reject women’s freedom of expression. These politics take her as an object with no feelings and emotions. Moreover, *Shafak* has raised her voice for the women’s freedom of expression, and condemned cultural and traditional politics which snatch their liberty.

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