



RESEARCH PAPER

A Kaleidoscopic Journey of *The Gaze* By Elif Shafak

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper will focus on A Kaleidoscopic Journey of Elif Shafak's novel "The Gaze". The researcher has selected this novel because it highlights the most realistic issue of judgemental society. The diversity of techniques and stylistic devices used in this novel have highly captivated the researcher's attention. Qualitative method has been used in this research study as it is considerably suitable here according to the researcher's mode and purpose of research that is to be descriptive. The researcher has concluded that the issue of judgemental society is prevailing everywhere in the world no matter which country it is. Therefore, she suggests that people should not only see the apparent beauty of others but also the inner beauty because it is everlasting and one becomes more beautiful when his inner self is pure and beautiful. But sadly our society judges people merely on the basis of their physical appearance so their beauty is cherished and ugliness is resented forever. Thus, it gives a lesson that people should not be so judgemental towards others and one should be known for his inner beauty instead of the bodily measures.

Keywords: Appearance, Beauty, Judgemental, Kaleidoscopic, Ugliness

Introduction

This research paper focuses on A Kaleidoscopic Journey of Elif Shafak's novel "The Gaze". It is a complex psychological fiction novel that is a bit difficult to understand but provides pleasure to the readers. Elif Shafak is one of the greatest leading female writers of Turkey who possess a universal position in the world of literature. Her writings have been translated into many different languages. Her novel "The Forty Rules of Love" is counted amongst the world's best hundred novels. It explores the notion of love and spiritual journey of a man and explains what it means to follow your heart. Our former Prime Minister Imran Khan also recommended this novel for the country's youth, in his attempt to bring them closer to Islam.

Main concept of the novel "The Gaze" lies in its title itself. It depicts the true picture of prejudiced side of society. The novel consists of four separate parts which have different characters and places but still they are interlinked with each other. Each part explores the stereotypical norms of the society that judge everyone existent in this world. B-C, a dwarf and the narrator, an obese woman, are the main protagonists of the first part, Istanbul-1999. Both are considered a source of amusement and a subject to be gazed by people due to their different appearances. B-C's Dictionary of Gazes has a separate place in this novel. It is a whole of numerous Turkish terms and references to various Religious figures which all seem to be based on seeing and being seen.

Pera-1885 is the second part of this novel in which the main character is Keramet Mumi Keske Memis Efendi, a man with slanted and narrow eyes. His mother died at the time of his birth when he was born with a featureless face that seemed to be made of wax. Subsequently, when his aunt created his features in a hurry, she couldn't draw his eyes

properly due to limited time so they were left as two thin slits. Thus, he also became a subject to be gazed by the prejudiced society due to his expressionless eyes. Thereafter, he decided to ease his pain by gathering as many people as possible in his cherry coloured tent where he kept the most beautiful and the ugliest girls of the world. The main concern of the third part *Siberia* 1648, is a Sable-Girl who is the product of reunion of a prostitute and a sable. The main characters of the fourth part *France* 1868, are La Belle Annabelle, the most beautiful jinn and her parents, Madame de Marelle and Monsieur de Marelle.

Hence, all the four stories are based on similar concepts of beauty, ugliness, to see and being seen, judgemental society, forbidden love, curiosity and mystery. The novel shows that how the different gazes of different people make others uncomfortable and their impact on their personal lives.

Literature Review

Elif Shafak is the most widely read and an award-winning British-Turkish female writer. She wrote in both Turkish and English. She has published seventeen books, eleven of which are novels, including "The Bastard of Istanbul", "The Forty Rules of Love", "Three Daughters of Eve", "10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World" and many more. Her work has been translated into fifty languages. Elif Shafak holds a PhD in political science and she has taught at various universities in Turkey, the US and the UK. She is an advocate for women's rights, minority rights, and freedom of speech. She also writes and speaks about a wide range of issues that include Turkish and European politics, democracy, and pluralism. Certain controversial topics addressed in her novels, such as child abuse and the Armenian genocide, have led to scrutiny from authorities in Turkey.

"The Gaze" is also one of her well known and famous works. It was first published in Turkey in 1999. This novel holds different aspects of Psychological Fiction which are rare to be seen in other novels. It was awarded "Best Novel" by the Turkish Author's Association in 2000. The novel consists of four separated, but coherent and interrelated parts. Each part may include different characters and narrators. The stories explore the philosophy of "gaze", in which characters may either gaze or become the subjects to be gazed and the fundamental differences between the perspectives of male and female.

"The Gaze" has been read and illuminated through different perspectives of critics, novelists, dramatists and many other writers. Some of their reviews are:

"This novel plays with the philosophical concept of the gaze by showing how the lives of an unlikely couple are dominated and shaped by the public gaze. Fed up with how people look at them whenever they go out, the couple, an obese woman and her dwarf man, decide to start going out in disguise and reverse roles in adherence to the much vexing eyes of the world. The dwarf also decides to compose a Dictionary of Gazes in which he defines words based on looking and seeing and the visible and the invisible." (Suhaib, 2018)

According to Suhaib (2018), by illustrating the way the public gaze affects and shapes the lives of an unexpected pair, this novel focuses on the philosophy of gaze. As they are tired of how people look at them whenever they go out, the fatty woman and her dwarf partner, decide to start going out in disguise and switching roles in order to avoid the annoying gaze of the world. Additionally, the dwarf writes a Dictionary of Gazes, in which he mentions terms based on gazing and apparent and hidden things.

"Time moves through and within us, in endless spirals and so does this book. "The Gaze" demands an undying interest and unbreakable commitment. Once you ensure it, it will slowly and gradually reveal its treasures. Strangely enough once you have finished the book you get a feeling that as if this book has no end and no beginning. As if the journey

through this book had been circular, you have reached exactly where you had started from.” (Farooq, 2020)

Here, the reviewer has talked about the plot construction of the novel which is circular as it starts where it ends and it ends where it starts. It can also be said that this novel has no sequence or plot at all rather it is an amalgamation of imagination and real life.

“This is a wonderful book, probably the best one I have read of Elif Shafak. This is a very well written story with parallel stories in different time that interdigitate to make the whole message stronger. It deals with how other people see us and the effects that seeing, being seen and not seen and not being seen have in our lives. Secrets that we all have and how they impact on our wish to be seen and be seen are also wonderfully depicted in this novel. If you wish to explore this excellent contemporary Turkish novelist, *The Gaze* is a good start.” (Chantada, 2021)

Jawwad (2016) said that the writing style of Elif Shafak is particularly distinctive in *The Gaze*. She has a lovely way of describing things in this novel. One cannot deny the fact that her work is really wonderful, regardless of how unique it is. Moreover, she was quite amazed by the fantastic Turkish vibes this book gives off as it comprises of various Turkish terms and foods.

“*The Gaze* is unlike anything I’ve ever read before. Several stories, set in different times and places, each deal with different facets of the burden of being judged by one’s outward appearance.” (Frederique, 2013)

As far as my review is concerned, literary techniques and stylistic devices are used in any piece of writing in order to give a special effect to that piece of work. Hence, there is an unending refreshment, enjoyment and pleasure in this novel which invites readers to read it again and again and find the hidden meaning of symbols, similes and metaphors, etc. These symbols, similes and metaphors take us into a fantastic world from where one does not want to return. Another most impressive thing about this book is that it contains several religious references and Turkish terms which show the writer’s well-informed and knowledgeable personality.

Material and Methods

Research methodology refers to the specific procedures or techniques that are used to identify, select, process, and analyze information about a topic. In a research paper, the methodology section allows the reader to critically evaluate a study’s overall validity and reliability. The main aim of methodology section is to describe the way in which the data was collected or generated and analyzed. The present thesis is based on *A Kaleidoscopic Journey of the novel “The Gaze” by Elif Shafak*, a renowned Turkish writer. Thus, qualitative methodology has been used in this research investigation. It would be descriptive research within the domain of qualitative research design. Being qualitative, this research work would be interpretive in nature.

Hence, qualitative research methods have been utilized for data collection in this research work. The text of the novel “*The Gaze*” serves as the primary source for this research study. Besides this research study, the researcher has been motivated by the diversity of techniques and stylistic devices used in this novel. Moreover, the educated reviews of different authors and worthy critics from notable newspapers, authentic websites and scholarly journals, serving as the secondary source for the research, have been used to support this research work. In addition to qualitative nature and descriptive design, the present research study is in accordance with the prescribed MLA format.

Result and Discussion

Data analysis is a method of turning raw data into useful information. It is an interactive process, where data is systematically searched and analyzed in order to provide an illuminating description of phenomenon.

Elif Shafak's novels such as *Forty Rules of Love*, *Honour*, *The Bastard of Istanbul* and *The Gaze*, all of them are embedded with the treasure of different gems in the form of technical aspects. For example, in the *Forty Rules of Love*, the technique of plot is at one and the same time modern and ancient. After surveying all the novels and their technical aspects, the researcher comes towards *The Gaze* and finds herself wonder struck, Oh! What a treasure of technical aspects, especially the metaphors and similes are so much that they can cover the whole aspect of the main novel to fulfil the purpose of research work. Thus, the present section aims at introducing the stylistic devices and literary techniques used in this novel which make it extraordinary.

Similes, the extended symbols, have been constantly used in this novel. For example, "A tent that, like a snake swallowing its tail" depicts the length and width of the tent as it ends from where it starts like a snake. "Wife like a rose" presents the beauty of a woman. In "as rich as Croesus and as wise as Solomon", the wisdom and richness of Keramet Efendi has been represented as Croesus was the king of Lydia who was renowned for his wealth and Solomon was a wise king of the United Kingdom of Israel who succeeded his father, King David. "As innocent as a dove" provides the description of the innocence of Sable-Girl at the moment she appeared on the stage.

"As aimless as water from a spring that could emerge from any fissure, as wayward as a pole star that wandered from one sky to another each night" represents the appearance and situation of B-C in the studio when he was getting sketched by the students while being naked. Through the simile "the thread that's been caught has neither beginning nor end; it grew longer when it was pulled, like a story that wore out the listener with its endlessness", the state of the narrator's sweater is depicted when it was stuck in the stairs and the old man helped her. "My life was like a bulky clock" represents the life of the narrator when B-C was not with her and before his entrance in her life, she herself and her life was useless but being with him makes her life happy and tickling like a clock again. "Like an enormous balloon" depicts the appearance of the narrator as she is very fat.

"She was as silent as a stone that had rolled to the bottom of a lake" describes the state of Keramet Efendi's deaf and mute wife on their wedding night. "A ceiling as high as the sky and a floor as soft as dove wings" presents the condition of room when Madame de Marelle was giving birth to twins. "She was as silent as mud drying in the sun" depicts the silence of La Belle Annabelle when she was being brought by Keramet Efendi. "As brisk fluid as the river" represents the purity and beauty of the face of La Belle Annabelle. "As small as a flea" presents the height of the jinn.

"As pitiful as vanilla ice-cream" presents the condition of meat which is sticky and glutinous. "His eyes were like a dim curtain" represents the unfamiliarity and strangeness that was occurring between B-C and the narrator. "I was as round as a ball" describes the situation of the narrator when she was filled with gas like a balloon. The similes like "as wide as two children" and "as rigid as laundry" represent the appearance of the landlady's legs. "As ugly and strange as a freak" and "as beautiful and as extraordinary as a jinn" depict the appearance of different people of the world.

Metaphor directly refers to one thing by mentioning another. It has also been used many times in this novel. For example, the metaphor "shaman's cloak of forty patches and a single thread" shows that B-C's single Dictionary of Gazes represents many facts and realistic terms related to humans and gazing. In another metaphor, the corruption of the

municipality and electrical community is depicted through the reference of “the clogged veins of a forty-year smoker. Once they clog, the blood doesn’t flow anymore”. Metaphors like “grains of badly cooked rice” and “boiled chicken” present the narrator’s view point about the people of Hayalifener Apartments.

Repetition is the action of repeating something that has already been said or written. It is also used abundantly in this novel, such as “I was dreaming about a flying balloon. I couldn’t make out the colour, but because the sky was Charcoal-grey, and the clouds were snow-white, and the sun was bright-yellow, it was definitely a colour other than charcoal-grey, snow-white or bright-yellow. The flying balloon in my dream existed for as long as I could see it, but ceased to exist the moment I couldn’t.” These lines, repeated many times in the section of Istanbul-1999 and the section of The Gaze, represent the dream-like and imaginative state of the narrator. “That’s how it is, out of stubbornness”. This line is repeated in the section of Istanbul-1999. It depicts the anger of the narrator because she is not happy with the carefree attitude of B-C’s modeling as he has no issue with getting naked in front of the students in studio.

“There was only one reason these varied women, who did not mention each other in their prayers and who did not let each other exist in their dreams, struggled up the hill to meet at the Westward-facing gate of the cherry-coloured tent.” These lines, repeated in the section of Pera-1885, describe the state of women who used to go to tent to see the Sable-Girl. “His heart in his mouth... head on the ground... so his intentions couldn’t be read in his eyes.” These lines have also been frequently used in the section of Pera-1885 when Keramet Efendi was telling a strange story about the dark side of the moon. “Whenever a person hurts, that’s where his heart beats. His heart beats in his eyes.” These lines, demonstrating the situation of Keramet Efendi, have also been repeated in this section. As he had only two thin slits instead of eyes, Keramet became a subject to be gazed and discriminated by the people and society. Therefore, it is said that his heart beats in his eyes because they are the main cause of his suffering and miseries.

Other textual lines which are repeated in the section of Pera-1885 and give description about Memis Efendi’s appearance, his wisdom and his childhood are: “He was a very clever and agile man. Since his birth, this world had considered him strange”, “How many books did one have to read in order to be wise, how many lands did one have to see in order to be a traveller, how many defeats did one have to suffer in order to become discouraged” and “Memis Efendi who was born to a woman who paid the ultimate price in order to have a little son, who was raised by his six older sisters and crossed the border that separates the two sexes; who for a long time had found himself observing how each of his elder sisters managed her own husband, and thought that there was no coincidence how these methods of management resembled each other, and that there were rules that all women knew but never mentioned.”

“Now in the nut-wood, oriental four-poster bed, in the room with a ceiling as high....., she didn’t make a sound. If she could have spoken, she would have asked God for a heavy snow. She would ask God to freeze the pain in her body, the feverish commotion around her. Life itself should freeze, so that centuries later she could serve as an example, before which people would fall to their knees, of the sin of being unable to give birth.” These repeated lines, in the section of France-1868, describe the condition of Madame de Marelle and the pain she was bearing while giving birth to twins.

Several lines like “Because 1648 was as famous for the plague as it was for its evil consequences”, “Siberia wasn’t concerned about these events”, “God was above nor that the Czar was far away” and “Timofei Ankinov was a sable trapper, like hundreds of others” repeat many times in the section of Siberia-1648, representing the historical events related to Sables and others. “The stomach is a mythical land.” This line has been frequently used in the section of Istanbul-1999 and presents the hunger of the narrator. Another repeated line,

“The back garden of childhood has the sour taste of cherries” has been used to depict the location of the garden of the landlady.

Reference is the use of a source of information in order to ascertain something. There are many references used in this novel, such as, “Come on... let’s find Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror’s tomb” shows the historical reference to the Emperor of the Turkey. “Steep hill was the bridge which the righteous will pass over and from which the unrighteous will fall on the Day Of Judgement” shows the biblical reference to the Day of Judgement when everything will be demolished. “The year the Salt Revolution broke out. It was during the first days of June. A mob that somehow couldn’t reach the Czar took revenge by burning down the boyars’s houses, looting their possessions and attacking their wives” provides the historical reference of uprising of Moscow.

“The great vizier’s wife was burning with passion for a slave, laughed the ladies....., finally one day she gave them the fruit and knives. Later she presented Joseph to her guests. The ladies couldn’t take their eyes off Joseph, and until they left the room they weren’t aware that they were slicing their own fingers instead of the fruit” presents the biblical reference to the story of Zeliha and Joseph. It depicts the beauty of Joseph and the state of Zeliha and other women after seeing him.

“When Adam and Eve tasted the forbidden fruit, they saw their differences for the first time. They become ashamed, and wanted to hide their nakedness with fig leaves. But one had a single fig leaf, and the other had three. Once they learned how to count, they were never the same again” shows the importance of forbidden things and sights through the biblical allusion of Adam and Eve. “According to the Holy Koran, jinns were created a thousand years before Adam. Jinns made of black clay are visible to the human eye, but jinns made of smokeless fire are invisible. There are many types and categories of jinns. Some among them cause madness.” describes the religious reference of Holy Quran and Jinn.

Imagery is the use of figurative language to represent the objects, ideas, and actions in such a way that it appeals to the physical senses. Different types of imagery is illustrated in the novel, such as sound imagery, rain imagery, animal imagery, scenic imagery, etc. “Bubbling of the dumplings in the pans” and “snoring of the women” represent the sound imagery. Animal imagery is portrayed in “Cruel bullies of the neighbourhood cut off the black cat’s tail, she licked her two new-born kittens clean and then abandoned them.” Water imagery is depicted in “The river was two steps ahead, the water was two steps ahead. It was only two steps to the thunderous flowing, drizzling, bubbling, to the flowering on the water bank, to being bait for the fish.”

Sound imagery is also shown in “You could hear the itinerant peddlers’ ice cream dripping as it melted, their simits crackling as they dried, and their balloons hissing as they slowly let out air. Lines like “Colour of salted green almonds”, “Garlic yogurt from a long, narrow-mouthed vessel” and “Dribbled melted butter over the white dumplings from a little pan” describe food imagery.

Poetic element is used in the novel numerously which shows the writer’s fine artistic taste. For example,

“The weather grew cold. Winter arrived.

The weather grew warm. The snows melted.

But he still hadn’t melted completely.”

These poetic lines show the weird physical appearance of wax-like Memis Efendi by relating it to the weather.

“It was like a shaman’s patched and threadbare cloak
Reflected in the broken pieces of mirror
Ready to unravel, it was like a piece of unraveled thread
Scattered randomly,
There was order in its randomness.
Time was without end, space was without limit
So why did it end up squeezed into this form?
He took the scissors and
Cut up the story on which the name had been stamped;
Scattering the pieces through time and space.”

These poetic lines represent the condition of Memis Efendi on his wedding night when he was rejected by his wife. Thereafter when he saw his own face in the mirror, he broke it into many pieces. He refused everything and preferred to be alone for a particular duration of time.

“Open the door, chief merchant, chief merchant
What will you pay as a toll, what will you pay
One rat, two rats, the third escapes to the trap.”

The poetic element has been used here to represent the situation at night when everyone was sleeping except the little girl who was about to steal the cherries from the garden of her landlady.

Foil is a character whose purpose is to accentuate or draw attention to the qualities of another character. Thus, through the characters of the father of Memis Efendi and his sisters, foil technique is also used in this novel. "The father who, once night fell, didn't hide the fact that he didn't like to see his son; who until his last breath slept in the bed in which his wife had died, and never touched another woman; who some nights would wake up suddenly and smash all the oil lamps in the house to pieces; who forever opposed the affection the girls showed this little boy; who would fly into abrupt rages, and take out his cherry-wood stick; who would ask after his son as soon as he came to his senses the next day; who would feel pangs of regret and beg forgiveness when he saw his own son's bruised and purple flesh. So he spent his childhood lurching between these opposites. On the one side his sister's undying affection, and on the other his father's passing rages." His father and sisters are the foil characters as his sisters loved him very much while his father hated him and used to beat him frequently.

Comparison or contrast is the way of exploring the similarities and differences between two things. This device was used when two sweets were contrasted by Keramet Efendi as, “Baklava was served in large portions; Sweets were served one by one”, “Sweets were unfamiliar and Baklava was known”, “Baklava was to be eaten and finished; Sweets were to be savoured. Sweets were to be enjoyed alone; baklava was what was what was served to neighbours and visitors. Baklava’s taste and essence was the same; but one

understood even from the different coloured wrappers that the sweets were all different from one another.”

Personification is a common form of metaphor in which human characteristics are attributed to non-human things. It is used in the novel through the description of a fountain that was present in the way of the Eastward-facing door of the tent. “The fountain was very pleased with itself; it sprayed water about enthusiastically.” Men who used to climb the hills have drunken water from this fountain so they described about it in these words.

Flashback technique is again and again used in the novel by the narrator such as ,when she misses her parents and recalls the events related to her childhood. She also used to recall the past events of mini bus and when she was slim. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the Istanbul-1980 section was a part of this flashback technique as well where her story as a young child is described.

Overall, the writer has used figurative language in order to give aesthetic effect to the novel. This novel also shows realism in many aspects as names of different cities and countries have been used abundantly. The novel actually has been written from the first person perspective of the narrator, an obese woman and lover of B-C. In the whole novel especially in its all parts of Istanbul, the readers have seen her cry, laugh, happy, sad, confused and lastly shattering through her perspective.

Conclusion

An in-depth analysis of the novel “The Gaze” has proved a very pleasant survey for the researcher because of its multi-dimensional aspects and unique techniques. It was quite amazing for the researcher to witness how dexterously Elif Shafak has completed this novel, describing all the literary techniques and stylistic devices in an exquisite manner.

For a reader who is interested in literature, this novel is not less than a grand feast both for the mind and the soul. *Honour, Forty Rules of Love, The Bastard of Istanbul, Three Daughters of Eve* and *The Architect's Apprentice*, all have their own place in literature but *The Gaze* is really here to be gazed at. The researcher pays homage and her heartiest appreciation for such a superb novelist to create such a literary masterpiece.

My advice for the incoming students is to select this novel for their research purpose because there are many aspects left for them to carry on further research.

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