

**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Eve Between East and West: A Psychoanalytical Study of Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve*

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**ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this study is to examine how early experiences of childhood leave permanent imprints on human's personality, determines the conflict between faith and doubt, fanaticism and skepticism in perspective of two different cultural and ideological beliefs, using qualitative research methodology. This work aims to find out that how Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) speaks for her identity and what are the psychological factors which lead Peri to a confused state of mind under the lens of Erik Erikson's Stages of development (1998) and The Reproduction of Mothering articulated by Nancy Chodorow (1978). This current study's findings show that, Shafak has uncovered the perpetual effects of family, society and tradition, which are deeply rooted in the psyche of every person from his/her childhood, leaving permanent imprints on one's inner self. This study recommends that childrens are pliable during childhood, and they can be moulded according to the situation.

**Keywords:**      Childhood Experiences, Ideological Beliefs, Mothering, Psychological Factors, Psychosocial Factors

**Introduction**

Elif Shafak, is a widely acclaimed female Turkish writer, and she has published seventeen books including the most notable *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009), and *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). The latter was published in June, 2016 which is the subject of this research. Dramatic conflicts of identity, religion, and history are examined in her bold fiction *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). In this novel, Turkey's unique geographical and political history, its Islamist and modern socio religious context is explored. The female protagonist character Nazperi Nalbantoglu or Peri is the perfect example of how social factors; family and society have influenced her mind and played a key role in developing her personality. Opposing beliefs of her parents and the chaotic political situation in Turkey badly affected her mind which pushes her in to a liminal state.

This story has two plots alternating between each other; first is real time of action till 2016, in which female protagonist Peri with her daughter and her husband arrives at a dinner. Second plot line is the memories of character. The story is set in Istanbul, Turkey, where the protagonist of the novel Peri and her daughter Denzi, get stuck in a traffic jam in Istanbul. They are driving to meet her husband at a posh party in a luxurious seaside mansion. She, in a traffic jam, encounters thieves and an attempted rape. The story is structured as a story within a story like Shafak's early work *The Flea Palace* (March 2002). The narration of story fluctuates between Peri's childhood, her time spent at Oxford and the present. This philosophical work *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) is not mere a story of three friends: Peri, Mona and Shirin: the confused, the believer and the sinner, but also a criticism on religion "God is a Lego set (39)" and political condition "Democracy is passé (132)".

The writer is thematically concerned with religion, politics, identity, existence, and feminism. In this novel, the female protagonist Peri is in great perplexity. Peri is conflicted about her identity and the existence of God, saying “While some people were passionate believers and others passionate non-believers, she would always remain stuck in between (56)”. She is mulling over faith and doubt, east culture and west culture, Oxford and Istanbul. Shafak says, “This novel tries to talk about faith and doubt in a completely different way to move beyond dualities”. Peri’s puzzled state of mind is the manifestation of author’s own neurosis, and she is the projection of author’s psyche. This research is an attempt to analyze Peri’s character in *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) through the lens of psychoanalytical literary criticism.

The main cause of human’s identity crises lies in their psychic construction, which is formed during their early days of life. One of the main targets of psychoanalysts is to change the experiences of early family relations. The concepts of Freud, Erik Erikson, and Nancy Chodorow are linked to the biological and psychical factors of human. The factors, which affects the social and political outgrowth of both genders, are addressed by psychoanalysts. In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow (1978) talks about the early life experiences of both genders boys and girls towards various situations. He explains that boys are trained to know about his social powers while girls are kept in close relationship to their mothers, so they are less prepared to deal in public sphere and more expose to the effect of family and society. Similarly, Sigmund Freud in his psychosexual theory states that personality development of human being takes place in five stages; oral, anal, phallic, sexual latency, and puberty. However, Freud’s psychosexual theory is further modified by Erik Erikson and states that personality develops in eight stages: trust versus mistrust, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair. The stages discussed by Eric Erickson are very important and each stage paves the way for another stage. This qualitative research aims to find out that how Shafak’s *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) speaks for her identity and what are the psychological factors which lead Peri to a confused state of mind under the lens of Erik Erikson’s *Stages of development* and *The Reproduction of Mothering* articulated by Nancy Chodorow (1978).

### Literature Review

Many research articles have been written on Elif Shafak’s novel *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). In an article “Eve between Two Worlds” writer is talking about liberal western mentality and the opposed uncertain state of Turkish politics. This novel intensifies the rising tension between strict Muslim faith and strict skepticism. It not only highlights the major issue of changing position of woman in Islam but also the sexual ambiguities of college life. The three characters in novel “the Sinner, the Believer and the confused” (63) are perceived as different forms of same character; Perri. In “Female Images as Representatives of different views on Feminism” author speaks for the emancipation of women in Muslim culture. Turkey is highlighted as a country of contrasts; on one side, both secular and religious life exist separately. However, Turkey is still full of stereotypes looking down upon the women and considered inferior in family and society. Reconciliation of these two civilizations; secular and religious never seems to be possible as Perri says “University friends. We shared the same house, were in the same college. We took the same seminar, but not all of us same”. Samuel P. Huntington in his book *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) presents the same idea of never ending war between cultures and civilizations. He argues that from now onward wars will not be fought for plundering and looting but for taking dominancy over another culture and civilization. *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) is a “kind of gallery of female images that embody various forms of perception of feminism”. The protagonist Perri represents a conscious but passive position on defending women’s rights. Selma lacks belief while Mona openly talks about her feminist views. On the other hand, Shirin practically performs these feminist beliefs. She is a practitioner of feminism. At the

end of novel, gender stereotypes are demolished, showing that efforts for women's rights must take place primarily in everyday life.

In an article "Three Daughters of Eve as an Allegory to Turkey's identity, Religion and History" author considers novel as an allegory to Turkey which is depicted through female protagonist Nazperi Nalbantoglu "Perri reflects the confusion of her identity in embracing Eastern or Western values, in being a Muslim or a Secularist, and in facing the everyday life turbulent events". As in 1980s, Turkey faces a series of historical, political and religious changes, Perri confronts with the same challenges in the novel. Chaos was made by right and left wing in 1980, leading to an army coup which later results in arrests and execution of many peoples. Same noise is echoed in the unsettling scenes following Perri's brother arrest.

Many women writers have talked about identity crises and raised their voice against the cultural partiality. For instance, Durrani (1991) in her memoir *My Feudal Lord* represents cultural politics and identity crises. She depicts oppression and subjugation of women in Pakistan. While talking about *My Feudal Lord*, she states that "The book is milestone for the cause of women in Pakistan. It should be recognizing as a stepping stone for women who are mothers, sisters, wives and daughters" (Shree, 2002).

Cultural politics and identity crises are constructed by culture, tradition and society. Gender roles, dynamics and positions of supremacy and subservience are specified by these principles. Peri's beliefs, norms, customs and tradition of their native country overlaps with their new beliefs and attitudes and norms of immigrant population diaspora at Oxford which throw her in the situation of doubt and in existential crises. This research will be different in its expression and will investigate the impact of these psychological and social factors on protagonist Perri's character.

### **Theoretical Framework**

"Psychoanalysis is a type of therapy that aims to release pent-up or repressed emotions and memories in or to lead the client to catharsis, or healing" (McLeod,2014). Psychoanalytic approach mainly focuses on unconscious mind rather than conscious mind. The main idea of psychoanalytic approach is that whole behavior of human being is dependent on past experiences which get embedded in his unconscious mind. The main objective of this qualitative research is to find out the influence of family, society, traditions and beliefs on human's personality development and mental state through the psychoanalytical study of Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). This paper will be primarily based on Erick Erikson's psychosocial theory *Stages of Development* and Chodrow's work *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Chodrow's states that our identity and subjectivity are based on social dealings. In her work, she emphasizes that independence is generated from without, from the experience of connecting, separating and reconnecting with others resisting the view of Jacques Lacan that independence is generated from within.

Erick Erikson modifies Freud's psychosexual theory as a psychosocial theory. Like, Freud Erik Erikson believes that personality develops in a series of stages. Erik Erikson divides the whole life span of a human being into eight stages. On each stage child faces multiple conflicting ideas. Each stage makes way for other stage. If child successfully overcome one stage, then he will emerge with psychological strengths in the other stage. On failure, he may not develop the essential skills. Eight stages are following;

First stage trust versus mistrust, from birth to 18 months, in this stage infant is totally dependent on a caregiver and he is uncertain about the world in which he lives. If infant receives consistent and reliable care, he develops a sense of trust and infant becomes hopeful. Otherwise, "if these needs are not consistently met mistrust, suspicion, and anxiety may develop".

Autonomy versus shame and doubt, a second stage occurs between the age of 18 months to 3 years. In this stage child develops a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of autonomy. If child successfully passes through this stage he will develop a sense of strong will and determination. If a child is harshly treated, he may feel a sense of shame and doubt in their abilities.

Initiative versus guilt is the third stage of Erik Erikson's theory, occurs between 3 to 6 years. This is considered a rapid phase in child's life. Bee (1992) says, it is a "time of vigor of action and of behaviors that the parents may see as aggressive". In this stage, child explores his interpersonal skills through initiating activities. If child successfully passes through this stage he feels confident in his abilities and can develop a skill of making decisions, otherwise, child develops a sense of guilt.

During the age of five and twelve, child begins to feel industrious (competent). If we encourage child's initiatives he will develop a sense of confidence in his abilities to achieve goals. On the other hand, if the child's abilities are discouraged he may develop a sense of inferiority.

Identity versus role confusion is the fifth stage of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development which occurs during adolescence. This stage of transition from adolescence to adulthood is very important. Through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goal, adolescence searches for a sense of self and personal identity. During adolescence child becomes more independent and looks at the future in terms of career, relationship, and families, housing etc. "The adolescent mind is essentially a mind or moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by child, and ethics to be developed by the adult" (Erikson, 1963, p 245). Bee (1992) said, this stage is "a reintegrated sense of self, of what one wants to do or be, and of one's appropriate sex role". If child successfully passes through this phase he will develop a sense of his own identity or fidelity. On failure child will become a victim of identity crises within society "I don't know what I want to be when I grow up" and also leads to role confusion.

Primary focus will be on this stage of Erik Erikson's theory *Stages of Development* of this research paper with Nancy Chodrows work *The Reproduction of Mothering (1876)* as a secondary source.

Sixth stage, intimacy versus isolation occurs in between the age of approximately 18 to 40 years. In this stage human beings tries to form intimate and loving relationship with other people. On success this stage will lead to virtue of love. On the other hand, failure may cause isolation, loneliness and sometimes depression.

Seventh stage, generativity versus stagnation takes place during middle adulthood from 40 to 65 years. Failure in this stage develops a feeling of unproductivity and stagnancy, while success leads to virtue of care.

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial personality development eighth and final stage is integrity versus despair, which begins at 65 and ends at death. Success in this stage leads to virtue of wisdom. In this stage human being reflect back on his/her life if they feel that they have not achieved their life goals, they become dissatisfied which lead to hopelessness and depression.

## **Material and Methods**

Different online journals, books, articles, library and concerned writers have been consulted. Data is extracted and compiled with the help of the above mentioned conceptual

framework. This study explores the cruel nature of society on human's personality development and mental development.

## Results and Discussion

Theory of psychoanalysis provides a platform for Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and Chodorow's theory of social reproduction. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychology, presented psychosexual theory. Freud's work was further carried by his student Carl Jung with altered form. In early days, both took interest in unconscious mind but later some slight differences occurred and Carl Jung developed psychoanalytic theory. Freud believes that libido is the energy which only drives sexual gratification but Carl Jung does not consider it a source only for sexual gratification but was of the opinion that it motivates a wide range of human behaviors; sex, spirituality, creativity etc. Erik Erikson (1902-1994) took his contemporary highly influential figure in the history of psychology Freud's psychosocial theory and modifies it as a psychosocial theory. Later in mid to late 1900s, there came Jacques Lacan who paid greater attention to language. Lacan believes that language plays more important role in development of human psyche than Freud assumed. Lacan presented three concepts; the real, symbolic order and mirror stage, which makes his theory different from Freud's talk therapy. Development of personality and the development of psychic structure and as well as differential elements of gender personality are based on social reproduction. Psychoanalysis emphasizes on the child's early life experiences in the society. Nancy Chodorow (1978) states when we reinterpret psychoanalytic development of male and female, we come to the result that women's mothering is responsible for the development theory of reproduction.

This novel introduces us to an ideologically and culturally divided family. The character study of Peri: a thirty-year-old Turkish "Modern Muslim" (4) wife, mother, and a charity trustee is endearingly constructed. Peri used to listen every single voice. Despite a little girl she could feel the wall between her parents rising higher with every passing day, that forms and shapes her personality. She never questioned her parent's attitude and relationship. Her mind was filled with questions. She thought, she would find the answers that turned her into indecisive reluctant and lost person. Peri was like a "Mute Poet" the name of the street where she was brought up, the poet was a "renowned Ottoman poet who resided in the area, swore not to open his mouth again until he was suitably rewarded by Sultan" (38). The way Peri's family members are described reveals why she is labeled as a "confused". Peri was brought up in Istanbul. In the 1980s surrounded by a traumatic family divided by sharp religious and ideological conflicts. Peri's house is divided into two opposite zone "the realm of submission and realm of war" (371). Her parents represent these two zones. Her house personifies Turkey's past and present chaotic and ideologically divided situation. Peri's father Mensur is a drinker, ill-tempered and atheist. Mensur was devoted to Atatürk "if it weren't for him, we we'd be like Iran". Contrary to her father her mother Selma is portrayed as a devout, strictly observant and zealot Muslim. Umut, Peri's elder brother is a Marxist while her younger brother Hakan is an "irredeemably religious and excessively nationalistic" (177) journalist, while Peri was just hanged in a middle trying to remain neutral in this awkward situation having plenty of questions in her mind.

To assist her to imagine through her nervousness, Peri writes down countless numbers of inquiries about God and spirituality in her "God diary" (57). Peri says that religion "plummeted into their lives as unexpectedly as a meteor, and created a chasm, separating the family into two clashing camps" (90).

Just like Peri is thrown into a conflicting situation, Turkey in 1980s, is exposed to a series of historical, political and religious dissonances. Turkey suffered from clashes between right and left wing that led to military regime, which resulted in the incarceration and execution of dozens of people. This is echoed in the unsettling scenes following Peri's

brother's arrest, Umut, who was beaten, stripped and tortured by the "Bloody" (32) method. Her brother's arrest leaves very bad effect on Perri's psyche

Religious turmoil in Peri's life takes her to Oxford University to find out that which of her parents is right about God and where her own belief lies. At Oxford she meets with two different modern Muslim women: Mona and Shirin, who together with Peri make *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) with opposing ideological positions. Shirin is a feisty, liberal minded, and faithless Iranian-British Muslim woman, enjoying wearing miniskirts, applying makeup, drinking and sex. She declares "Right now we Muslim are going through an identity crisis" (308) and calls for "Jean Paul Sartre's" (308) ideas. On the other hand, Mona is a devout Egyptian-American woman characterized as hijab wearing, Egyptian feminist. She confesses: "My hijab is a personal decision, my identity; it gives me peace and confidence" (136). Seemingly, Mona and Shirin reflect the shadows of her parents: Selma and Mensur, with Peri perpetually in the middle. She meets with an unorthodox, rebellious, controversial, but beguiling professor Azur. He believes that people suffer from "The Malady of Uncertainty" (247) and his life changing seminar pushes Peri into liminal state to question the nature and philosophical nature of God. On one side, Peri was happy by getting admission. It was a proud moment for her that she has made into the university because no other family member has made into university. On the other side Peri's state of confusion further deepens as she is to live now in totally different culture and civilization. Her mother is too much worried that she will be living in a totally new world where people do not know to speak Turkish, where people are not Muslims and do not recite Quran. She becomes more anxious when she saw students drinking beer, girls wearing indecent clothes or exhibiting tattoos or, worse couples kissing in broad daylight. Peri herself has some mixed feelings again: on the one hand she is "ready for her life to soar", to make her family proud of her. While, on the other hand, she is in doubt and not sure about her capacity with this entirely new and different situation and to master the culture shock.

It is very interesting that at a closer look the different female characters, having different personalities, different heritages and expressing different beliefs, can be perceived as three different stages of person's life. Thus "young Peri finds herself in the cross fire of her parents' eternal war: Mensur's Kemalist progressive ideas violently clash against his wife's strict Muslim behavior. Peri hesitates between her mother's - and Mona's - faith and her father's - and Shirin's - liberalism" (230). As Foucault says, "her dwelling between religion and skepticism, East and West, in Oxford and Istanbul has a profound effect on her psychology pushing her to dwell in a never lasting confusion".

## Conclusion

To conclude, Shafak's novel *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) is a compelling, immersive, and philosophical story that excels the conflicts of identity, religion, and existence. Shafak thoughtfully resembles the challenges and confusions that face Turkey through the eyes of her heroine Peri. She suggests that the identity of Turkey is defined by Peri's religious stances. Her unrelenting investigation of the challenges that "Muslim Modernus" face is both skilled and thoughtful. Furthermore, her ability to convey theological arguments is rare and important aspect in today's fracturing world. Thus this research work concludes that Shafak has revealed the perpetual effects of family, society and tradition which are deeply rooted in the psyche of every person from his/her childhood. Person's psyche remains same and never changes with the time, rather he/she goes to another kind of the system or how generous he/she enhances contemporary life as articulated by Freud and Erik Erikson. One's childhood experiences leave permanent imprints on his/her psyche. Also, Peri takes admission in Oxford to find out the answers she has written in her God diary and to root out the causes which are the sources of conflict between her parents, but she fails to do so because she has carried with her the traditions and beliefs which are penetrated into her unconscious mind during her childhood. These beliefs are carried through the means of women's mothering and civilization.

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