

Patrilineal Cultural Hegemony juxtaposes women identity; Cracking women self in Turkish Republic. An analytical reading to Elif Shafak
The Bustard of Istanbul

Faiz Abdulla.K

Ph.D Research scholar

University of Madras

Abstract:

This paper focalizes on how does women project her identity in Turkish republic. ‘*The Bastard of Istanbul*’ written by Elif Shafak, a Turkish author, enlightens the internal clashes affected to women in Turkey. After the great reformation of Ataturk, Turkey was slightly leaned to western culture. Elif Shafak discusses the complexities presented by political upheaval and cultural stereotype in which women were the main victims. This novel depicts two families, one Turkish and other Armenian, who share strong cultural and historical ties. All the major characters are women, they sandwiched with religious conservatives and secularist reformers. In due to the effect, establishing their own identity become complicated effort. Even though they are reformed with the leading effort of Ataturk, they were forced to follow some of the patriarchal cultural etiquette from their tradition. Shafak secures a huge space among contemporary Arab women writers to highlight gender identity and its disequilibrium in the mainstream of Middle East countries. This book also theorizes highly discoursed themes in connection with Arab women.

Key words: Cultural hegemony, Gender identity, Cultural stereotypes, Women Self

Mustafa Kamal Ataturk established Turkish republic in 1923. His aim was mainly to liberate Turkey from traditional conventions and make them modernized. Aftermath of reformation, Turkey labeled republic of Turk, and the influence of western values immensely bustled the middle class inhabitation. However being an Islamic country, getting modernized was a crucial dilemma for Turkey. Unless Turkey should distanced from Islamic law (Sharia) this process of

modernization was almost incomplete. His reformation indeed made a new appearance of Turks, especially Turkish women started to unveil their scarf. Atatürk capsules women's rights and duties in a new system of appearance.

Under those circumstances Turkish women have a quite different nature from their sisters in the neighboring countries. Rather than fighting straightly for their humanitarian needs, they have been received these needs in a silver tray from Atatürk. Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* intensifies a hybrid space where Islamists defend their right to practice religion, and the other hand Kamalists advocated secularist democracy. *The bastard of Istanbul* challenges traditional conventions of westernization and Characters portrayed by Shafak, are collectively unanimous. All lead characters are women and cracking their identity in different ways.

Like most of the South Asian countries Middle East countries were also under British colonization. In due to the effect of Anglophone, there was a reflective literary outburst over the tiny territories of Middle East. But the list of Arab English writers was not impressive. By the end of twentieth century this languid phase abruptly vanished and plentiful writers came to stick on this label. Majority of these were women writers. Along with, they were Arab- British or American immigrants or daughters of early Arab-American immigrant. Apparently the narratives disclosed within the specific hybrid frame work. However the narrative written in this phase has been labeled under few theoretical framework like post-colonialism, feminism, Hybrid or Anglophone literary discourse.

Bastard of Istanbul enlightens to the deep level of Turkish societal life. It grapples with the dark legacies of the country's Armenian genocide. And also highlight internal clashes of women affected in family, society and even in country. As matter of fact Elif Shafak mentions Turkey is a country belong to men. She said that, Turkey politics at local, regional and national level are overwhelmingly male. "It is very masculinity, it is very divisive and it is very aggressive". In her view the term sister hood is highly applauded rather than feminism in Middle East. *Bastard of Istanbul* is a powerful narration that has established a huge literary space for Shafak. Being her second novel Elif Shafak confronts various social issues affected to women in the country. In a deep scan *The Bastard of Istanbul* raises several thought provoking questions. In which women

characters and their identity are major discussion along with the influence of religious conservatism and secular ideas. Women in this novel create many rules for themselves, and those rules were antithetical to the present circumstances of society.

Kazanci family was destined with early death of male members for many years. There was no male patron in the family except Mustafa Kazanci. Yet he left Istanbul and settled in Arizona for higher study. So head of the family was Grand ma Gulsum, who handles all managements of the family. Mustafa kazanci has been treated with love and affection more than his sisters. He was considered as a precious gem in the family. Levant Kazanci had an obsession on having a boy to hear his surname. A series of measures have been taken to protect him from brutal fate of early death of male members in the family. He was treated as a king in the family. Being a male member his freedom was unlimited. At the same time female members should be more alert to get away from the hands of evils. Treating a male child was not same as treating a female child in that society. They become chastity conscious that ultimately transformed a safety measurement to reckon the woman worth. This consistent outrage towards women reflectively seen in *The Bastard of Istanbul*. Consequently women become ‘hyphenated self’ in a reformed society. By arguing this view from feministic perspective, undoubtedly these women are treated with prejudices. Since they are not migrants, or exiled. They are natives itself. But despite of the fact, their identity itself criticized by conventions of patriarchal supremacy. That directly shoots cultural identity of women and constrained with patriarchal walls.

Immediately after their father’s death and brother’s departure to the University of Arizona, all four sisters left under the matriarch Grand ma Gulsum. Zeliha, Banu, Feride and Cevriye along with Asya, the illegitimate daughter of Zeliha are the typical women characters. Asya, the protagonist of the novel being treated as Bastard. When Zeliha decided to protect her baby inside the womb, grand ma Gulsum exclaimed “A Bastard, you want to bring into this family, a child out of wedlock. A Bastard”! (29) The words hang out in the air Gulsum again continued to blame Zeliha on account of her pregnancy. She was ridiculed on her revolutionary decision of protecting baby inside the womb rather than just to get aborted. This pathetic condition paradoxically made juxtaposition on Zeliha’s modern life style. Grand ma Gulsum disgraced her

heels, short skirt and make up. “This is what happens when you dress up ... like a whore” (29). Cultural hegemony enumerates through male constructed stereotypes. That typically portrayed by the character Zeliha. Among all Kazanci women she was the only one who openly irreligious.

If there is male patron in kazanci family, he would have killed Zeliha. So that she should thank Almighty. It is an admonition, Grand ma Gulsum conveyed Zeliha. This indication vehemently confronted patriarchal power over women in society. Furthermore this multi settings of cultural divergence sandwiches women lives in Turkey. Obviously they are advanced with Ataturk reformative implementations. On the other hand their ethical etiquette transforms them to withdraw themselves from the constructed tagline so called reformation. One of the striking elements Shafak constituents in her women characters are to escape from this conventional framework. They never fixed and followed cultural stereotype, instead there was a wide effort to implant their self.

In order to highlight this escapism Shafak assuredly represented through the characters like Zeliha, Cevirye, Asya and Armanoush. At the beginning part of the novel, Zeliha’s revolting approaches conceptualizes the difficulties to preserve women identity. In fact the great reformer Ataturk himself made relaxation of practicing religion and culture but the remote phase of same society still waits to find the enlightenment of equality and equal participation of women in social life. Culturally women deprivation and men amelioration widely debated in this novel. This clash between male domination and female submission are not only pertained philosophical and intellectual discourse. But masculine strength over feminine impotence proves that women are being a hyphenated object since these biological differences exists. Ataturk concept of Turkish women was modern and intelligent in their societal outlook. On the other hand, religious conservatives strongly disputed to preserve traditional chastity of women. Likewise these traditional approaches were also customized through the character Grand ma Gulsum.

Kazanci’s new generation representative was an immaculate daughter of Zeliha, who gladly accepts bundle of love from her aunties. Asya kazanci labeled as bastard, because she has unknown father. Subsequently her identity also asymmetrically patterned. She realized that she was a bastard, only at the age of eight. In addition the unequal treatment of society made her

more reclusive. Asya pretend to console herself. Nearing her eighth birth day Asya plundered the pill box and swallowed all capsules she found there. It was a suicide attempt. She was utmost sure the fact that, in a family like hers, she wouldn't have privileged for suicide. Finding consolation was finally confronted with her deep passion towards music. Her obsession towards music was a great relief from the frustrated burdens of her surroundings. Her musical fixation was Johnny Cash, an American pop singer. His songs ultimately rooted existentialistic ideas. That makes enabled Asya to think in contrary of current system. Eventually to be an agnostic and nonconformist, Asya kept a long distance from angelic influences for shaping her selfhood.

The institution 'marriage' widely criticized on the other phase of the novel. Marriage is confronting the way of subjugation under male dominancy. Husband bossy figure over wife make her objectivity more complexes. The voice of a woman after marriage becomes more complicated. Rose was married by Barsam, an Armenian American and delivered a baby girl. Her post marital life was desperately offensive. Parents are more privileged to name their little baby. But at the same time things were quite disappointed for Rose. Although she had certain optional names like Annie or Katie or Cyndie etc, she convoluted with the burdened pressure of husband's family rather than simply to name one's own child, she awfully accepted the name Armanoush, sounded quite traditional. In view of this, dispensing women opinion is hardly difficult one. Especially Barsam family is migrants in America. Irrespective of migrants, male chauvinism is universally perceived. By the same token, women mistreated and not even considered her opinions at least once for naming her baby. Rose effectuates many lessons from her marriage with Barsam. That eventually she realized, whenever dates with Musthafa kazanci, She has been transformed into a silent creature in many ways. Her own arguments essentially are not justified. Post marital chronic resentment not only made you quite irrational and unreason perfectly, but sometimes it perfectly turns into reasonable.

Shafak portrays mother figured women in a deep ridiculous manner. Zeliha and Rose in spite of being from different continents reflected a collective unconsciousness of whole women in the world. They were out of affection towards their daughters. Asya never calls Zeliha as mom; instead she used to call her mom Auntie. It is a sheer transformation from generation to

generation. As an illustration, this cultural transition obviously identified in Asya and Armanoush. They are the victims of the coming generation. Henceforth their identity patterned in reversed manner. They were relatively unreserved. Their timely appeals towards cultural mismatches sharpen their social life.

Marshall Berman's and Rita Felski's arguments that "modernity cannot be reduced to a monolithic worldview. To be a modern, mean live a life of paradox and contradiction".

Occasionally these fluctuating imbalances distressed to the women in *Bastard of Istanbul*, which subtly executed in a political gender discourse. The gender of modernity process inscribes that modernity is an unstable process. In both rural and urban areas of Turkey shows that around 50 percent surveyed married persons treated, women as an instrument of satisfaction. Further more women inferiority in Turkish society flashes a preference for boy and patriarchal- patrial lineal tradition. Correspondingly it has proved in the treatment of Mustafa Kazanci. Their father believes that only a male child can preserve family lineage. In fact this system pursued all over the middle-east especially in Turkey. Gradually it stormed a collective unconscious. As a result, women were treated with this prejudice. The whole society itself leaned towards patriarchal desired stereotype, in which she is constrained to develop a domicile identity rather than seeking a self hood. In her view Deniz Kandiyoti, a famous academician in the field of gender studies in middle-east states that "the responsibility of preserving women's honor is oppressive for Turkish men who are expected to live up to the ideals of male superiority". She notes that men tend to engage in violent acts in order to reassert their domination over women like Zeliha, who refuse to conform to the moral codes of Turkish society. At the end of the novel Zeliha proves idealness of Mustafa Kazanci, was only a fake flattery. She deconstructs the whole system by bringing the fact that Mustafa is raped Zeliha and the so called Bastard Azya is the daughter of Mustafa and Zeliha.

Religion imparts a powerful legitimacy to men to subordinate women. The reformative transformation carried out in Turkish society only after 1920. Another striking feature of women that, how does superstitious belief influence by the character Auntie Banu. She was expertise telling fortune. Art of clairvoyance would have professionalized and take an oath that never to receive male customers. The reason behind this oath is rather certain. Women can be easily

trapped with fortune telling. Because those women eagerly anxious to hear their fortune in one way or other. It enumerates that majority of women were equally enthusiastic for their release.

Meanwhile the middle and upper class variations bothered leading women characters in this novel. Asya was sandwiched with middle class and upper class conflicts. Having a middle class background her mother consistently compelled her to be independent. Shafak portrays the necessity of being self sufficient especially women. Zeliha's tattoo parlor is a suitable example for this. Even though tattooing is prohibited in Islam, her approach was quite positive one. In contrast, it was difficult to manage a tattoo parlor in an Islamic country especially run by women.

Café Kundera one of the most compelling evidences to deconstruct conservatives. It is the centre of learning and exploring oneself. "A small coffee shop on narrow, snaky street on the European side of Istanbul"(76). Nobody knew why is it named so? Directly it doesn't have any connection with novelist Millen Kundera. Yet it was an unrestricted space where people can liberate themselves from conventions. Asya was a regular visitor to café Kundera. Within few years this café will be turned in to one of the most liberal zones in Istanbul. Because "modernist wants Turks to forward, at the same time traditionalist want them to pull backward"(81). If they put two steps forward then one step will be backward. This enforcing pressure make them sandwiched. Asya strongly protested against these conventions existed in society. Sometimes they feel themselves itched within these system of society. This half modern and half traditional make Asya distressed completely, and that point often overlooked as one of the reasons of her suffocation in family. She finds solace only at the café Kundera. Where she smiled candidly and talked unreservedly.

Hence the symbolical broadness of café Kundera occupies an influential role shaping Asya Kazanci character. On the other way it is a gateway of liberation especially woman like Asya. Tolstoy and his wife were regular visitors in this café. His wife often raises her voice for women rights. She was completely antithetic on male domination. In her opinion it is a lifelong phenomenon. "All talented women repressed by talented man" (85). She is also experienced in same way.

“Recognition! That’s what I want the whole world to admit that if given opportunity. Just because she was a women. Because she was very talented women oppressed by a very talented man”(86)

In café Kundera people were treated equally. All of their repressed feelings openly debated with the current social circumstances of Turkey. Shafak consciously marked café Kundera a space to cultivate various discourses of depressed characters. Since all their feelings are collective and they have to escape from the disdainful boundary and solidly eschew patriarchal norms from their life.

Armanoush is the step daughter of Mustafa Kazanci. She appears in the novel quite often to find her identity. Being Diaspora Armanoush exhaustively collect her fragmented family association from past. But her mother Rose wanted her to wedlock immediately. Unfortunately Armanoush passion towards books has not identified by anyone. In long run, she was a book worm. Whenever a woman read books she will be well advanced to all worldly systems. Similarly Armanoush was also distinguished with her attitudes and approaches. She mould up her intellectual beauty by reading widely rather than maintaining her physical beauty. Her family was under pressure looking a suitable boy for her. But she was quarreled with proposal by all means. A serious challenge here, in fact no one came to realize her intellectual power. It was rather a worthless effort especially for a girl. If she is well maintained her physical beauty, she would have married soon. This is a way of system carried out in every society. Here also women treated exquisitely for patriarchal expectations.

“You are a beautiful young woman who deserves the best man in the world. Now let’s see a little feminine glamour put some lipstick miss”(105)

The association of these words purely an implication with Armanoush fairness, and this should be well maintained for the sake of marriage. By analyzing the fact, feminine glamour stand parallel to masculine thirst. In which whatever the quality and achievement she acquired cannot be reckoned. Her deep reading and versatile knowledge never treated as a proud quality.

In the final analysis, all women in Turkey share unanimous history. Whether they belong to idealist or secularists, their common feelings to be released under male constructed stereotypes. To emphasize women issues in domain, polarizations like East/west, traditional/ modern, veiled/ unveiled, and Muslim/ secular serve as the crucial hindrances. *The bastard of Istanbul* also discloses the same obstacles faced by women particularly analyzed exclusively from Turkish women perspective. In that case religious conservatism strongly breaks down by the major female characters in the novel. Asya and Armanoush in fact represent new generation women. They construct their own rules to establish their self. Ultimately it turned into antithetical of all norms and customs in occasional circumstances.

Bibliography

Shafak, Elif. *The Bastard of Istanbul*. New York. Penguin Books, 2008

Barry , Peter. *Beginning theory; An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York. Manchester University Press, 2002. pp. 185-194.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. United state of America. Pantheon Books, 1978

Kandiyoti. Deniz. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Special Issue to Honor Jessie Bernard. (Sep., 1988), pp. 274-290.

Doshi, Tishani, —That indescribable in-between placel, *The New Indian Express*, June 22, 2012, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/lifestyle/books/article547503.ece>, accessed on April, 25, 2015.

Skidelsky, William. 2012. Interview With Elif Shafak, ‘In Turkey, men write and women read. I want to see this change’, *The Guardian*, Sunday, 8 April, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/08/elif-shafak-honour-meet-the-author>, accessed On May, 2, 2015.