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THE QUEST OF WHO AM I? REFLECTED IN SHAFAK'S 10 MINUTES 38 SECONDS IN THIS STRANGE WORLD

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the psychological development of Leila the central character of Elif Shafak's novel entitled 10 minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development is used in this research study as a theoretical framework. This research carries out the in-depth analysis of Shafak's novel 10 minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World for textual evidence. Human psychological development comprises of multiple factors. This study highlights Leila's psychological development through Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. The story of Leila's life is divided into three parts: The mind, the body, and the soul. This research utilizes three stages latency, (Industry vs. Inferiority) adolescence, (Identity vs. Role Confusion) and young adulthood (Intimacy vs. Isolation) from Erikson's eight stages. This study deals with two questions. First the role society plays in the psychological development of Leila and secondly, what are the factors behind identity crisis of Leila. This qualitative research aims to analyze the span of human psychological development which is not confined to one particular stage.

Keywords

Psychological Development, Society, Identity Crisis, Factors



1. Introduction

In recent years, Human psychological development is a center of attraction for theorists. Many theorists propose theories related to human psychology and mental processes. In the study of human

psychology, neo-Freudians focus on the role of society in human development. Neo-Freudians is a group of psychologists that focus on the role of social environment and culture in the personality

development of an individual. Erik Erikson is a Neo-Freudian and a renowned psychologist. He stresses that personality and human behavior are influenced by social circumstances. Moreover, he believes development is not confined to one period of life and for supporting his argument he proposes psychosocial development stages. According to Erikson, personality development occurs from adolescence till old age. He further, stresses that development and identity formation is not limited to one phase. This research focuses on the psychological development of Leila, the central character of Elif Shafak's novel entitled *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*. Elif Shafak, is an award-winning British-Turkish novelist. In 2017 she was chosen by Politico as one of the twelve people "who will give you a much needed lift of the heart" (Shafak n.d). *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and RSL Ondaatje Prize; and chosen Blackwell's Book of the Year. Shafak in her literary masterpiece entitled *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* unfolds the story with the chapter entitled "The End". The story starts with the death of the central character of the novel. This award winning novelist is known for her different themes and psychological insights of subjects. In her under discussion novel she gives insight into the life of those people who are outcasts from the society. This study investigates the role of society in the psychological development of an outcast girl, Leila. This research also focuses on the concept of identity and hidden factors behind the identity crisis of an individual. This research uses Shafak's novel entitled *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* for textual analysis and

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development for theoretical framework. A human body needs multiple things for a healthy development. Like body, human psychology is always in the need of nourishment. Psychologists have debated a lot about the food for inner self of human beings. Erikson proposes his theory of psychosocial development with eight stages. These stages cover the life span of an individual from childhood to old age. In his theory Erikson used the word 'crisis', as an individual needs to pass from every stage. If at any stage the individual remains in unresolved conflict it becomes a hindrance in the healthy psychological development and leads him towards identity crisis. Identity is uniquely possessed by all individuals whereas this unique possession cannot be formed alone. Multiple factors are involved in the formation of an individual's identity. Aristotle has rightly said that man is a social animal. Ide. Societal circumstances play a vital role in the formation of an individual's identity. "The term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Katzenstein 1996).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this paper is to highlight how an individual see himself is totally dependent on how other see him. This research sheds light on the role of society in the psychological development of an individual. This research also focuses on the concept of identity and how an individual move towards identity crisis, with a special focus on Leila, the central character of Shafak's novel.

1.2 Research Questions

This study addresses following questions:

Q: 1 What role society plays in the psychological development of Leila?

Q: 2 What are the factors behind the identity crisis of Leila?

2. Literature Review

Childhood, adolescence and then old age are three phases of an individual's life. Sigmund Freud focuses that only childhood experiences form the identity of an individual. Freud focuses on the fulfillment of sexual desires for a stable identity. Erikson focuses on the role of society in the development of personality. Erik Erikson, a famous psychologist presents an influential lifespan theory of development. He stresses on psycho sexual and psycho social domains in the development of an individual. His theory proposes eight stages which are also known as eight phases of a man. Each stage is characterized by basic psychological conflict whose successful progression takes an individual into next stage. In case, psychological conflicts remain unresolved then an individual confronts with crisis. Ego identity is also a concept of Erikson. In the lens of Erikson, the growth of an individual's identity like the growth of a baby in womb. He says that identity grows with time and in each phase an individual face challenges which must need to be properly overcome. Unresolved conflicts are the cause of problems in psychological development. Rosyada (2013) in her dissertation entitled *Identity Crisis of the Second Generation of Asian-Indian Americans as Reflected in Lahiri's The Namesake* discusses the life of second generation immigrant Gogol Ganguli. His unresolved conflicts of adolescence become the cause of his identity crisis. This study uses Erikson's theory of psychosocial development for literary analysis for highlighting life

crisis of second generation immigrants'. The problem for the protagonist starts with a unique name that becomes an agitation for him. This study shows identity- crisis of second generation immigrants. Abuhassan & Azmi (2019) in the study entitled *Psychosocial Development Portrayed in Jane Austen's Emma* focuses on the psychosocial development of Emma. This study reveals that central character of Austen's Novel Emma is overly praised girl. In the fifth stage which is identity versus role confusion, the central character Emma fails to develop self-knowledge as she distorts the real meaning of maturity. Larasati (2017) in her study entitled *Identity Crisis in Adolescence period Experienced by Asha in Shilpi Somaya Gowada's Secret Daughter* highlights the identity crisis of Asha with in the theoretical Framework of Psychosocial development theory by Erikson. This study focuses on the stage Identity versus Identity confusion and also uses the theory of identity achievement by James Marcia. This study shows how the development of central character Asha is influenced by the societal circumstances. This study stresses that Asha is able to pass through psychosocial developmental stages successfully and she becomes able to resolve her identity crisis. Astuti (2018) in the study *An Analysis of John Smith's Character in The Novel "I am Number Four"* uses qualitative descriptive method to show the psychological development of John Smith. This study reveals that experiences of Smith throughout his life and shows that environment and social encounters influence character development. Aditya (2010) in her dissertation entitled *a contrasted analysis of main characters in Cradle of Secrets novel by Lisa Mondelo* seen from Erikson theory. Tammie

and Serena are two characters and their life journey is also different. Tammie passes through psychological developmental stages successfully. Serena fails in her developmental phases. Thus the study shows the psychosocial development of every character is marked by the attitude of individual towards the problem. Different studies utilize Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory for highlighting the influence of society, circumstances and environment in the development of individuals. This study under the frame lens of Erikson's psychosocial stages shows the development of Leila, the protagonist of Elif Shafak's novel entitled *10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world*. (Kendra, 2021)

3. Methodology

This research aims to follow qualitative research method. The argument in this paper is about the societal role in the psychological development of Leila and her identity crisis the main focus is on following three stages (latency, adolescence, and young adulthood).

3.1 Analysis

Shafak's novel opens when the death of Tequila Leila, a sex worker. She is murdered but a human mind continues to operate a few minutes after the death of body. In these minutes through tastes and flashback technique, Shafak presents the story of Leyla Afife Kamile. Leyla Afife Kamile changes her name to Tequila Leila. Identity is not simply linked with name but Leila changes her name as she remains uncertain about her position in the world. As History, culture and society play an important role in the development process. Novel opens when Tequila Leila is murdered and people around her asks about her identity. "Poor woman. Who is she?" (Shafak,

2019:7) Who is she? The question of who an individual is remains with the person even after death. After death through flashback technique, life span of Leila revealed. This study focuses on latency, adolescence, and young adulthood stage.

Industry vs. Inferiority: This is the fourth stage. According to Erikson in this stage Children commence to identify their caregivers and parents. This is the stage when children start to take initiatives that is why proper guidance and support is required. Any negativity in this stage or guilt can lead to the sense of guilt in their remaining life. The complexity of this stage can easily be seen in the character of Leila. At the young age of 6 years, Leila comes in conflict with her parentage. She has three caregivers. Baba, Mother and Auntie. She likes the affection and company of this triangle. In this stage Erikson states that children interact with world and want to initiate everything by their own. In this stage guidance and support are required. In this very sensitive stage Leila faces two sorts of conflicts. The triangle Baba, Mother and Auntie. Her trust triangle breaks when she comes to know that these caregivers have revised their roles. Who her real mother is? This conflict ultimately becomes the cause of her own identity crisis. Two care givers, one is mother and one is aunt. Both women love Leila and both become the cause of hindrance in her very early years of development. . One day her auntie shared "Suzan is not your mother Do you want to know who your real mother is? I am the one who gave birth to you. (Shafak, 2019: 41) Auntie's biggest secret. Become a constant source of conflict for young Leila and gives pace to the seeds of doubt in the mind of young Leila. This confusion of her mind makes her agitated. "Who in the family was

more reliable- her father, her mother or her aunt?" (Shafak, 2019:44) is a first crack on the self of Leila. Leila's family life is trapped in patriarchal set up of the provincial city of Van. Women are not allowed to be vocal. This suppression from the very start makes her restless. This confusion of whom she actually belongs marks the beginning of crisis in the psychological development of young Leila. In the same age her uncle started sexually abusing her. "Leila was six years old; her uncle was forty-three" (Shafak, 2019:68) Uncle uses Leila for her sexual gratification. Naïve Leila was unable to understand the reaction of this molestation. In order to silence her on this abuse, Uncle injects this thing in her mind that she is responsible for all. "I used to think to myself, why, she's a sweet innocent girl, but it turns out you like to play games with men's minds... Remember how you behaved on the bus that day, giggling all the time to get my attention? Why were you wearing those tiny shorts? Why did you all me to come to your bed at night? You could have slept in your parents' room, but you didn't. Every night you waited for me. Did you ever ask yourself why? Well, I know why. And you know why. (Shafak, 2019: 98) Thus, a sense of guilt in Leila's conscience makes space and causes troubles in her later life. This is the stage of life when a relative makes the childhood of Leila miserable. Uncle plays first with the body and after that he manipulates the young mind. Thus, in this stage guilt of being a wrongdoer overcomes the self of the protagonist of the novel. According to Erikson, one unresolved conflict disturbs the whole process of development. . This is initiative vs guilt stage, from this very stage two conflicts come in the mind of young Leila. A heavy burden on her conscience

makes her alienated from the other children of Van. These unresolved conflicts and miseries snatched the blessings of childhood from Leila.

Identity vs Role Confusion: This is fifth stage. Uncle's molestation makes her guilty and in the very age of trust dependence, she is unable to trust anyone. In this stage, as per Erikson's theory Leila must socialize with other children. Leila reacts differently as in the prior stage the negativity of society makes her a confused child. She has no friend in school and always score low grades. Leila's mind remains confused with the guilt of Uncle's misdeeds due to this, at the stage where an individual form his identity. Leila is unable to form a stable identity. She wants escape from her surroundings. She also faces emotional neglect which bothers her. Identity is important as it signifies individual's place in society. She has only one friend Sinan (the son of the Lady Pharmacist). A perfect environment is required for children upbringing. Leila's psychology was already deeply wounded at this stage. That's why she reacts differently. Usually in this stage children like to show off their new skills as per Erikson, children need peers for maturity. "She had no friends in the classroom." (Shafak, 2019: 88) Her class fellows make fun of her and she feels scary with their judgmental glares. In this stage where Leila feels changes in her body. "Her body had been changing fast. Hair under her arms, a dark patch between her legs; new skin, new smells, new emotions. Every day she checked her face in the morning with a curiosity that made her uneasy, as though half expecting to see someone else staring back." (Shafak, 2019: 88). Leila has lack of self-identity. She even cut her body which shows her agitation as Uncle never ever miss any chance to play

with her body. “She cut herself on her thighs and upper arms, where no one could see the marks, using the same knife with which she sliced an apple or an orange at home, the skin curling gently under the glint of the blade.” (Shafak, 2019:92) She hurts herself as she is hurt from inside. According to Erikson (1968), in the development phase of adolescence, the most essential developmental task is to solve the crisis of identity versus role confusion. This is a very sensitive stage as in this an individual develops distinctive sense of identity, and discover the social environment. In this phase the focal focus is on developing meaningful relationships with other people. Leila’s family and the cultural setting around her are trapped in the patriarchy. Leila’s father does not play a positive role in her life. In her identity formation years Leila’s father changes his life pattern. He thinks his abnormal son is the result of his wrong doings. He changes not only his life pattern but his business as well. Sudden changes in home’s environment adds problems for her. Father started to consider himself a sinner. “He was being punished for his sins, past and present” (Shafak, 2019:83). Leila’s conscience is overburdened with guilt due to Uncle. Her young mind is full of doubts, in this stage according to Erikson doubts and conflicts should be resolved for healthy upbringing. Leila asks questions about Hell, punishment and forgiveness but her father always portrays a dreadful image of Hell and severe punishment. All these unresolved conflicts make her rebellious. “God, God, God! I’ve had enough of this crap” (Shafak, 2019: 99) Smell of wood- burning stove comes as her brain continued to shut down. In the present she is dying and the memory comes of a period when she starts rebelling. Erikson emphasis

that parents should allow children to explore things and do interaction in the stage of identity formation. Leila’s father wants her to see everything from his eyes. A supportive and friendly environment is required in this stage for the development of a healthy mind. In Leila’s case each developmental stage is full of conflicts. Leila’s school is not her a safe place as she is known as bad apple. Her home is not a shelter and after father’s obsession of sin, she becomes more confused. During this stage the individuals will form self-image; the integration of ideas about one’s self and ideas about how others perceive us take place during this time (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). Leila realizes the she is heavy with Uncle’s child. For covering this her father decides her to marry her cousin. The son of the man who molested her. In this stage individuals form their identity, and Leila was looking for escape. Leila wants to disappear which is clear sign of her frustration. Individuals who fail to achieve a cohesive identity will exhibit a confusion of roles (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). She eloped from her house and became a whore. She chooses the role of satisfying others sexual needs whereas she always remains unsatisfied in her life. “Just because you think it’s safe here, it doesn’t mean this is the right place for you (Shafak, 2019:111)”. Her family disowned her and she becomes Bitter Ma’s one of the finest whore. In her confused role, she chooses the role of satisfying others whereas deep inside her remains unsatisfied. Intimacy versus isolation: This is Erikson’s sixth stage of development. In this individuals face the task of forming intimate relationship with lovers. A person reacts as per his previous experiences. Erikson states that a person needs to form relationship. In this stage fearing

commitment, avoiding intimacy, can lead to depression, loneliness and isolation. Leila in her role confusion becomes a sex worker. In her childhood, Uncle molested her and father suppressed her desires. Everyone wants to tame the shrew. The impact of society and culture ultimately makes her a whore. All the friends of Leila the group of five which is dear to her becomes her shelter. Sinan is a boy who used to play with codes. She is the son of Lady Pharmacist, who in the childhood becomes only safe shelter for Leila. Jameelah' is s daughter of Muslim father and Christian mother. Between two Abrahamic religions, Jameela chooses her mother's religion Christianity and becomes an outcast for her community. Zeniab, Zayneb, Zeynep, "She claimed she could write her name in 122 ways" (Safak, 2019:125). She is a dwarf who comes from northern Lebanon to the low hills of Istanbul, for earning livelihood. She is a fortune teller in her free time only for her favorites. She is Leila's friend as she serves all whores in brothel. Nostalgia Nalan, "Me? Don't have a name yet." (Shafak, 2019:54) Nalan changes her identity through sex-change treatment and from Osman he becomes Nalan. Hollywood Humeyra, she losses her identity as she becomes a bride. Everyone treats her like a servant without any name. Her husband beats her every time he likes. She escapes from the patriarchal set up, changes her name, gets a fake ID and becomes a nightclub singer. In this stage when individual makes connections, Leila's friends are all those people who are in a way or other facing identity crisis. Leila does not form connections with those who have stable identities. Her identity is not shaped in a healthy environment. She becomes a whore and makes friends who all are delved into the crisis of being. Her

dissatisfied self finds consolation in the other dissatisfied selves. She is unable to make connections with other people who are considered normal in the eyes of society. Her all friends are disturbed selves which shows they also suffer from failure in psychological development stages. She as a whore comforts others but unable to get comfort for her own self. In this stage, Leila remains in her identity crisis though she has many visitors. She starts loving D/Ali. He becomes Leila's soulmate as his interest in not Leila's body. This man comes in her life without any interest in her body. "How about we just sit and chat" (Shafak, 2019:138) D/Ali works for communist revolutionary. Artist D/Ali marries Leila and that's how she gets rid of Bitter Ma's brothel. Leila gets the chance to live freely with D/Ali. Unfortunately, Leila's life and this new identity lasts for a very short time. Enthusiastic D/Ali lost his life in revolution march. "And they confirmed that D/Ali had been brought there. He was one of the thirty-four fatalities, most of them trampled to death in the stampede on the Street of Cauldron Makers." (Shafak, 2019:169) Very first she tries to be her own self and at once she is again lonely and penniless. Once again, circumstances force her to become a whore. In Ten Minutes Thirty seconds, the flashback of Leila's memory where she reads the horoscope which states that it's the high time to know yourself. It's the first time she agrees to go for pleasing a client and it becomes her last one. On the way back to hotel, two men offered her a ride and she accepts as she needs money. It's the last ride and after that Leila's body found murdered and identified as a whore. "Poor woman. Who is she? Can't you see, you moron? She's a whore". (Shafak, 2019:7) Leila all through her

life remains unable to know who she is. She wants to live her life. Leila's identity remains in crisis. She becomes what her uncle blames her to be. In her confused state of mind, she opts the role of body seller whereas inside her body souls remains restless. The story of her identity crisis doesn't end with the death of Leila as a whore. In part II of the novel, her mind stops working and she becomes a body, a dead body. Even her body, a dead body passes through many crises. She has no blood relation and as per laws five of her friends can't claim her body. She remains an ambiguity for everyone. "Like all the unclaimed dead, she too, would be consigned to the Cemetery of the Companionless". (Shafak, 2019:189). In her life she wants to live at its full. Never in a thousand years would she agree to be spoken of in the past tense." (Shafak, 2019:1) She becomes a dead body but she her struggle of who she is? Remain unresolved. The place for her burial is the Cemetery of the companionless. This shows, those remain unable to get any position in society, society even doesn't accept them after death. The loneliest graveyard becomes the final abode for Leila which is not acceptable for her friends. Her all friends are in identity crisis that's why they plan to give their beloved friend a death with name. Her friends dig her grave and the battle of body starts. In the fight of police and friends over Leila's dead body, she finally gets the place in sea. "She dropped over two hundred feet, fast and straight." (Shafak, 2019:302) She finds solace in water as she finally feels that there is no pain down in the water. Thus, part III, the soul depicts she is free underwater at last. This discussion unfolds that society plays a major role in the formation of Leila. Her body and soul both remain trapped in unresolved

stages. Every failure at each stage become the cause of Leila's disturbed self.

4. Conclusion

Early years of Leila's life in which the development of an individual starts. Leila becomes the prey of a molester. Her initial stages of development remains trapped in the negation of her own self. Erikson states that crisis in one stage of development ultimately cause problems in the development of next stage. Her identity crisis starts from the point when she comes in doubt about her parentage. She was a lonely child who becomes a sex worker. Due to her emotional neglect from her very early childhood, she becomes a rebellious one. She doesn't want to be whore but as Erikson states that society, culture and history play a vital role. This it can easily be seen in Leila's psychological development. She does not leave her house to be a whore. Once again, people around her makes her a pleasing object. After her death, her same body gets the place in the loneliest grave yard. To conclude, Erikson's concept that individuals and society co-develop can easily be seen in the story of Leila. The same society that makes her a whore does not allow her to be buried like others. In identity development phase, she remains unsuccessful to form an identity of her own due to prior stage unresolved conflicts. Leila's life remains a rollercoaster of emotions in which she gets freedom after her death in water.

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