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AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE: THE IMPACT OF CONSUMER PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY IN *THREE DAUGHTERS OF EVE* (2016) BY ELIF SHAFAK

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Abstract

This study unfolds the patriarchal structures of the consumer society in Elif Shafak's novel "*Three Daughters of Eve*". It explores the twin domination of the women and the nature in the consumer patriarchal society. It brings forth many crucial concerns of today's consumer society. This patriarchal structure of our society defines the women and the nature as exploitable. This research gives us an overview of the prevailing patriarchy and hierarchies in our society. Through the framework of Ecofeminism, it discusses the increasing limitations of the patriarchal consumer society in our environment. This research uses close reading to highlight the impact of patriarchy both on the women and the nature. Thereby, creating a scope for further studies in the domain of the exploitation of the nature.



1. Introduction

Elif Shafak has portrayed the freedom of expression, cultural dialogue and the human rights in her works especially women's rights. She has blended the Eastern and the Western traditions in her stories. It seems that these incidents can happen anywhere in the world. The existing problems within a human society have been discussed in her

works. She has represented the issues in a way that they appear to be universal and not limited to a single country or a person. They become the matters of daily life regardless of time and space. Elif Shafak has tried to portray the mindset of the society in her works. Many writers have observed this concept of humanity and adapted it in their

novels, poems and articles etc. She has crafted her novels very wittingly on these themes or subjects. She has always kept an element of ambiguity in her novels, so that the reader pays attention to the problems that have been portrayed in her novels. Lucy states that “Her exploration of the challenges...and her ability to convey...is a rare and important skill in today’s fracturing world.” (The National). Shafak has designed her works to represent the fractured world and its power structures; which leads the world into deterioration. She describes each theme in depth, but through the use of ambiguity. She wants her readers to have their opinion and gives small hints to find the truth. She has made the categorization ambiguous in her works, so the readers can have an idea that there is no absoluteness and one should strive hard to find the truth behind a subject matter. This research is designed to explore the various twists and turns in her novel *Three daughters of Eve*. She examines many themes in her novel and try to view them from various aspects. Through her novel, she has tried to play a role in changing the mind sets of the society that still consider women as inferior for the sake of their hegemonic control over society. Istanbul has always been a part of her writings and this novel is also a prime example of this fact. She has used the technique of flashback to narrate past and relate it to the present in her this novel. By using this technique, she has tried to mention the various themes in the novel. She has blended many themes in this novel which represent the problems of daily life such as child Psychology, spiritualism, religion as an ambiguous and biased matter, euphemism, modernism etc. There is no limit to

the themes presented by her, but the most important one is of feminism; as how women suffer under this male dominating and power structured society. Pangtey in her review emphasizes that “Shafak has also touched upon the topic of womanhood...There are moments of feminism. For instance, the protagonist, a woman with an Oxford education in Turkey, has been portrayed as more or less equal to the men in Turkey.” (First Post). Through the protagonist and the central character of the novel *Peri*, she tries to explore the women’s search for freedom, equality and identity in the society. It will give the women a chance to cope with the society that has been suffocating them. She describes that the concept of women’s liberation has been limited. The treatment given to the women in the patriarchal society defines them as things to be used. Shafak has stressed on the portrayal of the feelings and emotions of her characters such as *Peri*; rather than the action. She is interested in discovering the behavior which has increased these problems. She proposes that the primary concern should be focusing on one’s state of mind. She promotes the idea of women’s equality and freedom of speech in terms of the gender, class or societal status just like men. Then they will be able to represent their true feelings... men rule the world. This made sense – a thousand years ago ... human beings lived then in a world in which physical strength was the most important attribute for survival.... Today, we live in a vastly different world. The person more qualified to lead is not the physically stronger person. It is the more intelligent ... A man is as likely as a woman to be intelligent, innovative, and creative.

We have evolved ... ideas of gender have not evolved ... (Adichie, 2014, p. 8). She suggests that if we try to normalize something; it will become too normal. That's what happened in our society. We have normalized the view of men being more authoritative and powerful than women. She compares past with present. Her work asserts that in past; the physical power was considered sufficient as human beings had to survive in harsh circumstances. Now it is changing and people see this as a one-sided view. They are of the view that a person requires mental capability far more than physical abilities. Today intellect is given more importance than physical powers. Adichie emphasizes that women can be as powerful as men. The main idea behind her words is that the circumstances are changing in today's world. We need to change our thoughts regarding the importance given to men and women on the basis of gender. Shafak has tried to portray this viewpoint in her works especially in the *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016). However, this research work suggests another twist in this concept of feminism that is ecofeminism; which is also the core theme of Elif Shafak's novel *Three daughters of Eve*. It is a movement that has worldwide implications and claims peace both in terms of feminism as well as ecology. It is this connection between the women and the nature that signifies the violation and aggression shown towards both of them. It rejects the construct of the view that women are second sex. Ecofeminism combines ecology and feminism into one entity and seeks to draw parallels between the exploitation of the environment and the women. Ecofeminists believe

that the male-dominated culture thrives on the exploitation of the women and the nature. In this concept, both the women and the nature are considered beneficial till they can be used by the society. Otherwise, they are not even considered a part of social consciousness. Ecofeminism is based on certain fundamental claims that point to the existence of important connections between the oppression of women and oppression of nature. It is essential to understand the nature of these connections in order to understand the oppression of women and nature, and finally, every feminist theory must include an ecological perspective and vice versa. (Warren). Warren in his definition has tried to state that it is important to know the background behind an issue in order to understand it completely. He thinks that the idea behind a subject matter is the one which gives rise to a point of view. He states that we should not be conscious about the materialistic approach regarding a subject matter that is focused by the consumer patriarchal society. The narrative of the novel *Three Daughters of Eve* on different levels such as plot, context and style; explore the various dichotomies, masculinity and power structures of a consumer patriarchal society. This novel makes it easy and accessible for the readers to examine the problems of society. As philosopher Karen Warren conceptualizes it; An ecofeminist ethic is both a critique of male domination of both women and nature ... It not only recognizes the multiple voices of women, it centralizes those voices. Ecofeminism builds on the multiple perspectives of those whose perspectives are typically omitted or undervalued in dominant discourses, ... (Warren, 1988, p. 151)

He explains that ecofeminist notion values the interdependence and diversity among all the forms of life. From the notion of ecofeminism, he gains the insights of a social analysis of women's oppression that intersects with other oppressions such as exploitation of the nature. Ecofeminism affirms the need for a new paradigm. From the beginning ecofeminism criticizes the social construct, developed by the patriarchal system which considers the male dominated culture as superior. On the other hand, their counterparts' the women, and the nature as inferior. Patriarchy seems to be beneficial for people but, in fact it is not. These male centered dichotomies are the major problem that subdue the role of the women and the nature in society. Both are considered to be here to absorb all these inequalities of the consumer patriarchal society and its power structures. As Krawehl asserts that "Mother and daughter together in the car, stuck in the thankless traffic of Istanbul, on their way to dinner party. What appears to be an everyday situation soon turns into a hot pursuit." (para. 1). She in her review has tried to portray the violations inflicted on both the women and the nature. She claims that Elif Shafak has written her stories in a way that seems to be the representation of daily life such as traffic jams and the people stuck on the roads due to it. The dinner parties arranged on daily basis which women consider as a representation of their status are the problem. It is frustrating but, no one is interested in finding a solution. For Peri this traffic and dinner parties were a source of frustration; as she is unable to find any advantages which are connected to this so-called development. Shafak asserts that;

Istanbul didn't seem to mind. Time, brutes and lunacy it had aplenty. One hour more, one hour less; one brute more, one lunatic less – past a certain point, it made no difference (Shafak, 2016, p. 12-13). This development is producing luxurious cars on daily basis and increasing their number day by day, but this process cannot explain the cause of these traffic jams and the pollution in the environment. Moreover, Elif Shafak has a viewpoint that women are still being placed in the context of this patriarchy and the society has lost its concept of humanity which is the core value of its existence. As Shafak expresses that; The impression she left on others and her self-perception had been sewn into a whole so consummate that she could no longer tell how much of each day was defined by what was wished upon her and how much of it was what she really wanted...Peri disliked these dinner parties...left her with a migraine... (Shafak, 2016, p.12-15). Peri was able to interpret the deterioration existing in the environment. As a woman she also observes the misogynist point of view present in the society which has made women sex objects. A woman is viewed as modern because of the wrong perception of the society that it has adapted to. The society is happy because it supports their consumer point of view and give them benefits. The patriarchal society wants everyone to adapt with it but, Peri was unable to fit in this dilemma. This defines the parallels in the concept of ecofeminism; as how patriarchal structures are meddling with Peri's psychological condition. Peri is not only haunted physically but, psychologically as well. People think that they not harmful towards the nature and

it is very attractive thing to look at it, but its advantages are becoming its disadvantages. The attainment of the unnecessary benefits from it has even limited its advantages. This imagery of both the women and the nature are described as beautiful, but in it originality cannot be seen. The extent of the problems aroused by the patriarchy is hidden under this concept of beauty. Elif Shafak's novel views the destruction caused by the social conformity and power structures. It is not limited to the humanity only, but the whole society and environment or ecosystem is in a state of destruction. As Joseph says that; While there is no central definition of eco feminism it is generally regarded as a feminist approach to environmental ethics. Ecofeminists see the oppression of women and nature as inter connected; as a movement ecofeminist deal with issues of gender, race, class and nature. (Joseph, 2015, p. 4). This shows the dilemma of Peri's life which has thrown her in isolation and her senses are unable to keep pace with the time. She still faces gender inequality in the city of Istanbul which is a highly developed city. It defines that how much the city of Istanbul is developed, but cannot develop its mind set. It still carries the destructive concepts of social conformity. The people still see the personality of a person on the basis of their class, position and gender; that's what benefits them. They are unable to distinguish between luxuries and necessities. The people are using the sources so frequently and never fear that this excessive use of resources will put them to an end. They are making their lives comfortable but, in the veil of this development making their environment suffocating. The society

is oppressing both the women and the nature. In order to overcome this patriarchy, we need to understand the logic behind their domination. People should promote equality, non-violent and anti- hierarchal treatment towards both of them. The ecofeminists view that these patriarchies reinforce stereotypes. For example, the stereotypes that people have connected to religion have no rational ground behind them, in fact they are becoming the source of one's misunderstanding. These stereotypes are spreading more and more in our environment. For example; she experiences that in the past when she was a student and was coming back from secondary school with her father. She expresses her desire to pray in the mosque. As Elif Shafak states that Peri wanted to pray in the mosque but, finds that. "She treasured the plentiful light from the high, arched windows, the chandeliers, the calligraphy, the architecture of Sinan. It troubled her, however, that the women's sections were either tucked away at the back or lodged upstairs behind curtains, always secluded, separate, small... 'Girls should pray at home,' he said... 'This is Allah's House, it's for everyone,' said Peri." (Shafak, 2016, p. 84-85). From this illustration we get to know that even praying in the mosque for women is a taboo. She is shocked to see the distinction made between the prayer of the men and the women; which is clear evidence of the patriarchy prevailing in the society. The prayer which is selfless and sacred thing is being separated from the idea of freedom of expression. The environment which is said to be a proof of the freedom of expression does not allow the women to show their freedom even in religious matters. It

becomes a constant way of suffocation for them. The freedom of expression which is viewed essential for the survival of people in their environment and society is unavailable for the women; who deserve it the most in this suffocating environment of the consumer patriarchal society. “Ecofeminist theory has brought into sharp focus the links between development and gender. It has highlighted the fact that the violence against nature and against women is built into the dominant development model.” (Rao, 2012, p. 3). She describes that the development which appears important in today’s society; gives way to materialism in the society and leads towards controlling behavior. The objective of this study is to explore the point of views involved behind the patriarchy of a society and its rigid values. This novel uses both the past and present in order to discover the true horrors of one’s life. This study views the hierarchal structures of consumer patriarchal society. It interprets women and nature as parallel in their exploitation done by society. This also highlights the question, are we really able to see the true exploitation which is not only related with the physicality, but with the mentality of the consumer patriarchal society as well. It also views society’s inability to stand against its errors and make people’s life peaceful. This research highlights the patriarchal views of a consumer society who views everything according to their parameters which sometimes neglect the true essence of a subject matter. The Ecofeminist narrative is concerned with the protest against the oppression of women as well as nature in consumer patriarchal society. Elif Shafak has

shown through her novel *Three Daughters of Eve* and promote the need for the implementation of this narrative. She is also a part of this consumer patriarchal society and has incorporated these ideas in her novel so, the people can be aware of these facts. This research draws the concept that deviating from the societal laws has become a taboo. If a person tries to transgress these cruel and mean laws; it may result in violation, social chaos and the negation of one’s personality. It is deadly enough to cross the boundaries of conscious and unconscious. Ecofeminism links nature or ecosystem with feminism to see the patriarchal structures of a consumer society. This enables people to see the patriarchy that stems out from the domination of women and environment in consumer patriarchal society. The focal point of their attention is the profit it gives. It discusses the exploitation that a man in power can do for its pleasure and profit. They are able to take advantage of both. Nature and women seem to be helpless and passive; that’s how ecofeminism creates a parallel between them. Peri; thinks that the city of Istanbul is an exact picture of this patriarchy. “Though easy to forget at times, the city was a stormy sea swollen with drifting icebergs of masculinity, and...gingerly and smartly, for one never knew how much danger lay beneath the surface.” (Shafak, 2016, p. 10). These icebergs of masculinity created by men controls the society. The masculinity is the major problem that subdue the lives of the women and their roles are limited only to subordination; just like the nature has to absorb all the inequalities. It is to be viewed that if these icebergs are broken then it will fall on

the person who tries to broke it and they have to face the consequences. Such factors seem to be strong that the breaking of these icebergs appears to be a dream. Peri the protagonist is paranoid of the inequalities that are prevailing in the society right from her childhood. It affected Peri's past and still affects her present. These inequalities produce a fear that is still alive within her. It is playing an important and threatening role in her life. It gives an image of Peri's life and the existentialist crisis that the women and the nature have to face in order to survive. Peri is not afraid of the strict values and laws, but it has become a constant reminder for her that she is a thing which is useful till it gives benefits to others. Being a woman; she tried and wanted to get away from this binary of male/female, but is always stuck at the hand of consumer patriarchal society. The condition of Peri also demonstrates that this state of affairs is deteriorating day by day. It appears to be beautiful, but has many holes and flaws made by man which are rarely or never noticed. They remain unnoticed and get worse just like Peri's traumas are getting worse day by day. She just like nature or ecosystem is absorbing everything, but cannot protest on the injustice that is being done to her by the society. Ecofeminists protests against this oppression. As Shafak says that; She never littered the streets, never jumped the queue at the supermarket, never raised her voice – even when she has been treated rudely.... Madness coursed through this city's streets, like an intoxicating drug in the bloodstream. Every day millions of Istanbulites downed another dose, not realizing that they were becoming more and more unbalanced.

(Shafak, 2016, p. 4-5). The city of Istanbul is very calm to look at but, the people of the city are carrying madness in them and their condition is miserable. Istanbul is the capital city of turkey and is considered the most civilized one but, after considering the facts it looks the complete opposite. The city is on its way to madness which is increasing every single day, but women like Peri are expected not to speak or have any objection about the suffocating environment present around them. Ecofeminism; examines the women and the nature as connected because it defines how human reality is in depth connected with the ecological reality. It defines that how the social injustices play a major role in the ecological injustices happening in our environment. It explains that women have an important role in the environment and its development. They are an unforgettable part of society as well as ecosystem and should not be forgotten. It also spreads the word that how we are concerned with physical concepts related to the women and the nature. The society has limited their value and our primary focus are these physical viewpoints. We should also include the internal and psychological perspectives.

Peri was always judged and cursed by her mother. Her mother; who was unable to see the psychological condition of Peri that made it difficult for her to take any decision. It seemed to her that no one can understand her. This fear of misunderstanding keeps her in ambiguity. The outer surface is smooth to look at, but the internal surface seems to be still rough. Just like it the ecosystem appears fine and beautiful at surface level, but is internally weak and rough. As Peri's

ambiguity never gets solved. “Always in-between...unwilling to choose sides, so focused on not upsetting anyone that in the end everyone was left disappointed...She was not an actor but a mere spectator. This was their problem.” (Shafak, 2016, p. 349). The dilemma of the contemporary society is that it cannot take action, but a mere spectator. It is a constant danger and the society cannot do anything about it. The destruction has now taken a new direction that does not seem to be a harm at the physical level, but is damaging the society internally. This ambiguity is increasing day by day. Male dominated society appears to be taking a huge part in these developments, but in the disguise of help it destroys the women and the nature. This help is for the problems but, does not deal with the cause behind it. Many people inquired Peri about her problems and tried to help but, no one was able to understand the root cause. The consumer viewpoint of the society can also be linked with ecofeminism that everything is needed just for a short time and has no long-term value and one’s priorities change all the time. It plays a major role in these parallels between women and environment. It shows the domination that not only stems from the subordination of women as something non-human, but also consider the nature a thing to be exploited as well. The society associates materialism with both these and cannot see the true facts and figures. Patriarchal consumer society in fact creates those facts and figures that are suitable for them. Both the nature and the female become the victims of the abuse of society. Ecofeminism focuses on the effects of patriarchy and consumer society that has given birth to this

haphazard life. People think that the city of Istanbul has become advanced, but the culture which seems to be an integral part of it appears to be merging with the materialistic view of the society. As Shafak views that; The brothels of this city could tell many a story had they found ears willing to listen. Call girls...and aged prostitutes beaten, abused and threatened by clients looking for the smallest excuse to lose their temper...housewives who would never speak a word, for there were no words in this culture to describe marital rape. It happened all the time. In this city where everyone feared outsiders, most assaults came from those who were too familiar, too close. (Shafak, 2016, p. 41-42). These exploitations not only define the domination, but the views that the people of patriarchal consumer society present. The society claims that they speak for the rights of people especially women, but in reality there is no work done to improve this situation. It is getting worse day by day. The visible harm on the outer level that can be seen by the naked eye appears not to be destructive to the extent; that the internal causes are. It defines the ideology used by the colonizers (consumer patriarchal society) to oppress the society after viewing its weakness i.e., the domination laying beneath its surface. The so-called morals play a major role which limits the improvement of a society especially with reference to the women and the nature. Another twist in this aspect which is the root cause and helps the occurrence of these problems in patriarchal consumer society are the never-ending desires of women. It is suppressing them, but are not known by them. Women are

possessed by the materialistic views that prevail in the society and are unable to see their domination done through this. Peri; the protagonist of the novel hates to go in the late-night dinner parties. There was a constant battle between the males and the females at the parties but, with the passage of time it has also started among the females. It has given a chance to the patriarchal structures of society and people especially, men who have started taking advantage of this battle. It has helped them to suppress the women more than ever. They are involved in kitty parties that is a source of their broken connection from the society and the environment. They appear to be adoring luxuries which is not helping them at all. "They scanned, scrutinized and searched, hunting for the flaws in the other women, both manifest and camouflaged ...became, ...both victim and perpetrator." (Shafak, 2016, p. 8-9). Women's desire of being more and more sophisticated than others does not give any benefit. They search flaws in each other and the men become more and more confident in their search of these flaws. It creates an environment of hatred for women; to which the resistance is complex and difficult.

The people are making their environment unsafe that it does not require any outside forces, but the internal forces existing seems enough for the promotion of these hierarchies without any major realization in the society. They make people uncertain about their position in the consumer patriarchal society. There are two kinds of cities in the world: those that reassure their residents that tomorrow and the day after, and the day after that, will be much the same; and those that do the

opposite, insidiously reminding their inhabitants of life's uncertainty. Istanbul is of the second kind. (Shafak, 2016, p. 301). The society scan the problems of its people, but is unable to solve them. The people especially women become a victim and are unable to resist the consequences that are brought along. The city of Istanbul cannot get rid of its uncertainty as there is no certainty in the idea of giving rights to women. The society support them to get appreciation but, is not able to track their problems. Peri observes that the traffic is increasing day by day and things have become so messed up that she cannot find any individuality. Everyone is crying but there is no one to listen; as all of the humanity seems to be a victim of it. The people are becoming prone to luxury such as the luxurious cars which are giving them comfort physically, but cannot ease the tiredness lying in their hearts. It makes no difference at all; even when they have these luxuries. Everyone in the city of Istanbul wants to follow west, but neglect their own culture and its essence. In this adaptation of western culture; they have produced flaws. They want to be well updated with the norms of the world, but unable to remember that in this process have forgotten their own values. In the act of becoming modernized they totally forgot their genuineness. They are becoming colonizers that do not need any external force. The capitalism also plays a major role in this stance that everything is becoming a commodity to get benefits. The women play a major role in the economy of a country. Women are giving benefits to the society and environment. When it comes to equality; it is not considered anywhere. They are there to present the

wealth and modern attitude of consumer patriarchal society, but should be limited to household works only. Just like it, the natural resources are being insanely used and there is no concept that we should use them in a proper way. They are at the verge of extinction. In short, this study views that it is all about one's thinking that make a person able to see the flaws of the consumer patriarchal society. The consumer society does not accept this freedom and reject all factors that come in the way of its flawed development. Elif Shafak through her narrative *Three daughters of Eve* summaries the perspective of ecofeminism that reflects the different ways of analyzing the connections between the women and the nature, as well as the differences in the nature of women's oppression and solutions to them. It explains the subjugation of women and nature in the consumer patriarchal society. To conclude, ecofeminism aims to explore the links between women and environmental exploitation and calls for an end to all kinds of oppression. It asserts that there is a wider category of elements that articulates social practices. Ecofeminists try to create an awareness among the people on the hierarchies existing in the society especially male dominated culture.

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