

Cracks in the Facade: Unveiling Traumatic Realities in Shafak's Honour

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Abstract:

The complex and multifaceted nature of honour killing inside the communities has been a major subject of discussion since time immemorial. The diversity of the term with its hidden agenda navigates deep into the lives of common men with rigid rules and customs. Culture favours strict codes regarding honour and upholds integrity by ensuring the smooth functioning of society using the domain of control. They articulate, influence and justify certain modes of behaviours and suggest them as standard patterns of conduct. Honour killing, the vicious practice of exerting dominance over individuals always favours masculine gender by projecting females as weak and powerless. Elif Shafak, a renowned Turkish short story writer and novelist juxtaposes the various ills prevalent in society under the pretext of honour. Shafak in *Honour* (2011) exposes the realities behind the curtain of Turkish culture and tradition, which centres mainly on the practice of honour killing and its consequences.

Keywords: Trauma, honour, different Perspectives

Introduction:

The term trauma takes its origin from the Greek language, denoting wound. However, with the passage of time, the term intrigues into other fields like psychology, and medicine with different interpretations. Psychologists use this term to denote the emotional response made by individuals who face disturbing and distressful experiences in life. Sociologists propagate another dimension to the world by analyzing the powerful influence of social structures in the lives of individuals.

The multifaceted nature of trauma alleviates distress and tension in its victims, inhibiting normal behaviour. The profound impact of trauma leaves individuals to be grief-stricken, and it triggers the feeling of helplessness. The resultant emotional deregulation adversely affects interpersonal relationships. It initiates the sense of isolation and withdrawal from social networks out of the fear of misjudgement as well as by the lack of trust. As a human rights activist, Shafak uses the novel as a medium of expression to outpour the realities of Turkish culture. In her novel, *Honour*(2006), she discusses in detail the controversies related to honour with utmost significance and explores in deep the vicious role it plays in the life of the characters

Ferenczi in *The Clinical Diary of Sandor Ferenczi*(1932) defines Trauma as “What is traumatic is the unforeseen, the unfathomable, the incalculable. . . . Unexpected, external threat, the sense of which one cannot grasp, is unbearable” (171). Shafak, in *Honour* (2011) details the impact of psychological trauma on the characters as an aftermath of the horrible incident of honour killing. Trauma theory advocates a holistic analysis of the nature of human experience who witness events that aggravate anxieties and create fissures in the values of safety, security and freedom.

Human Rights Watch defined ‘honour killing’ as:

acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female family members who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family which can be for several reasons such as refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of sexual assault, committing adultery etc (7)

Sonika Sethi, in .“Women as the Sacrificial Lamb on the Altar of Honour: A Feminist Reading.” details how the novel discusses the evils of honour killing as, “ how women and their dreams are sacrificed in the name of family honour by society” (24). Rebecca E. Boon in *They Killed Her for Going Out with Boys: Honour Killings in Turkey in Light of Turkey's Accession to the European Union and Lessons for Iraq* defines honour killing as “the murder of a girl or woman by her family members due to their disapproval of her alleged sexual misbehaviour, which they perceive as defying societal gender norms”(816). Awwad, another eminent thinker puts it as, “Honour killings reflect the patriarchal and patrilineal orientation of society aimed at creating a system of social control designed to protect important familial power structures including reproductive power.”(41).

Rana Husseini in *Murder in the Name of Honour*(2009) believes that there will be an increase in the rate of honour killings as long as “beliefs relating to women as the bearers of family honour”(382) exist. Turkish traditions and customs value honour as the basic trait of existence. This dominant ideology is prevalent in society, especially from the viewpoint of male members. Tariq, upholds the view that, if a person is found to have tainted honour, then he will not be respected in society. In his words:

You could not walk on the street anymore unless you got used to staring at the pavement. You could not go to a tea house and play a round of backgammon or watch a football match in the beer house. (...) No one would pay heed to you when you spoke; your word would be no more valuable than dried dung. The cigarette you offered would be left unsmoked, the coffee you drank bitter to the end. You would not be invited to weddings, circumcisions or engagements, lest you bring your ill luck with you. (251-252)

Berzo, another character upholds the value of honour as high and he is not even ready to accept his elder daughter Hediye. In his words, “...I’d rather see the corpse of a daughter of mine in the Euphrates than have her bring me disgrace’ That’s what he said after Hediye ran away, remember” (194). The stereotyped view of family members regarding honour makes parenting a difficult process. The harsh gestures loaded with sarcasm make Hediye feel

insecure inside her home, especially with her stepmother. She says, "... the bringer of shame. Dropping her load, the woman (Hediye's stepmother) stood across from the girl, almost transfixed. Then she took a step forward and made a gesture with her lips as if spitting on the floor"(266) . The notion of honour hits hard in the life of Hediye who commits suicide by hanging.

Naze, the maternal figure of Honour(2006), represents a stereotypical Turkish society that values men over women. Women, like Naze, were tuned to believe in the custom that the ubiquitous presence of a boy child adds more respect and value to the family. The ardent desire of Naze to beget a son was indeed a manifestation of the unwritten cultural norm of Turkey. She adds,

So it was that is the land where Pink Destiny and Enough Beauty were born. 'Honour' was more than a word. It was also a name. You could call your child 'Honour', as long as it was a boy. Men had honour. Old men, middle-aged men, even schoolboys so young that they still smelled of their mothers' milk. Women did not have honour. Instead they had shame. And, as everyone knew, shame would be a rather poor name to bear (16).

The psychological trauma that Pembe undergoes in the novel comes from different reasons. The lack of intimacy and emotional numbness in the marriage life profoundly affects her. The cultural expectations regarding marriage and motherhood force her to be within the system of family and endure the various evils of abusive relationships. The extramarital affair of Adem with Roxana and the cumulative effect of their relationship unfurls another layer of Pembe's trauma. The financial stress and the multiplicity of her role as mother, caregiver and provider add to her trauma.

The cultural pressure to maintain honour and the inherent fear of social stigma troubled Adem right from his childhood. Adem, as a child has firsthand experience of childhood trauma. As the sole witness of the breakdown in his parent's marriage life, he develops doubts about the stability of a healthy marriage life. The betrayal from his mother creates emotional turmoil in him and he internalizes the insecurities of it by practising the role of a rude partner to Pembe.

Bessel A. der Kolk, in his *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* discusses in detail the consequence of trauma: We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on the mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present. Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way the mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think. The central character of the novel, Esmâ, through her life experiences, provides another version of honour-based exploitation. Family, instead of being a haven of love becomes a site of oppression for her. The pain and the longing prevalent in her is evident in the lines:

Most of the girls I knew had their bedrooms and could keep their doors closed as they pleased. Not me. If I were to lock the door of the room that I shared with my younger brother, my family would fear something terrible had happened to me. That is why I loved the bathroom the only place where I could be alone with my thoughts and my body... I wondered, for the umpteenth time what I would look like had I been born a boy instead (p180)

The cultural norms in the name of honour demean and disfigure the life of Jamila and her bitter experience is a microcosmic representation of the collective struggle of women in Turkish society. Jamila's unmarried life was not a decision made by her personal choices rather it was forced by the conventions of family in the name of honour. Another poignant incident in her life occurs when Adem marries Pembe, her twin sister. In a culture, where honour dominates, society prioritizes family reputation over individual desires. Her internal conflict and suppression are the byproducts of the demands of honour-based culture. The emotional burden of Jamila is evident in the lines, when she says, " Twice in her life she had come close to killing herself: after being brought back to her father by her kidnappers, still a virgin but forever tainted; and on the day she learned Adem had asked for Pembe's hand." (178) Shafak pictures Iskender, the eldest child of the Toprek family, as a suitable example to demonstrate how the hidden agendas of a strict society can influence and misguide teenagers. The false and distorted viewpoint of society regarding the values of honour forces males to be authoritative and take control of the events. In the absence of his father, Iskender assumes the role of the custodian and behaves as if he has the power to control the entire household. He fears that even the slightest change in the behaviour of his mother can disrupt the harmony and stability of his family. The rift between individual autonomy and collective responsibility forces Iskender to adopt violence as the weapon for his existence. In this context, he uses honour killing as the only way to escape from social stigmatisation.

The title encapsulates how superficiality of the outward appearance of the perfect family system hides a plethora of human emotions in the form of pain, longing and the emotional turbulence. The crack in the title symbolises the disparity between individual desires and the norms of the society. The facade of honour, projects the illusion of perfection where individual suppresses their authentic being to live in accustom with the bitter realities.

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