



Research Paper

Identities of Muslim Women in Three Daughters of Eve

AUTHOR

Abstract- This paper investigates recent theory in relation to women's situation and position in Islam and society. This study discovers Eve's daughters- Peri, Shirin and Mona- to study how sexual characteristics, religion and culture extend beyond and stereotype intertwine in the novel to build unique practices, values, way of life, beliefs and confronts in the lives of women. This work argues with the purpose of Shafak's accumulation of these partly cover descriptions supplies a centre for intersectional feminist discussion as a composition for comprehending the versatile complex nature of identity. There has been an intensifying debate surrounding the exercise of Hijab in the West. The trend invites miscellaneous reactions worldwide; on the other hand, the broadly held of the western inhabitants deems it a representation of religious dedication, an indicator of gender oppression and cruelty and an impediment to good commune relationships. Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* scatters its conventional established illustration and counteract or neutralize its utility in obstructing the social relations of Muslim women in the West. This paper evaluates Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* from a gender viewpoint. The most important issue or question addressed in this search is on the subjectivity of Muslim women characters as characterized in the novel. The paper doesn't simply give importance to the supremacy of Western perception, other than the clash of Muslim women's subjectivity to accomplish gender equality. This paper investigates the problem of gender equality, which tends to be restricted to recognizing the aspects of discrimination in gender relations in Muslim culture which are determined by dissimilarities in explanation approaches of resources of religious tradition. The paper compete that hijab neither supports or encourages elementary inclinations nor controls Muslim women living style in the West. The conventional expression is hold up by the increasing racial discrimination. The consequence of this paper contribute significantly to the existing narrative by demonstrating how the three females in the novel purpose as detached self identities throughout which Shafak discusses hypothesis of western society about women and Islam. This paper finishes that Shafak's work, giving influence to representing how these women ascertain ways to project their extraordinary voices and confront domination.

Keywords- Gender Equality, Subjectivity, Identity, Muslim Women, Critical Discourse Analysis

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Three Daughters of Eve is a sterling saga of a middle-aged woman, who is living with her family – husband, children and her mother – in the beautiful city of Istanbul. Glimpses of her past occur sporadically throughout the novel – her childhood in Istanbul, her study in Oxford University, her friendship with Shirin and Mona, and her relationship with her Professor Azur. When we take a look around at the women in this novel, one may delve into family history and examine mothers and daughters. Elif Shafak, while depicting the relationship between the two, has evoked profound emotions to translate the warmth of the relationship.

There is a large part in the novel that deals with the pious relationship between mother and daughter. Naturally, every mother-daughter duo has a story to tell. Per contra, Peri and her mother had a different kind of relationship between them. Mostly, daughters seem to relate better to their mothers but Peri was closer to her father, Mensur, who was a rationalist and unlike her mother, an atheist. Peri always shared her feelings with her father. She and Selma had a rocky past. There were a lot of mixed emotions between them. They loved each other, but their priorities kept them apart throughout their whole life. There was a religious wall between them, which was not tried to be broken by either of them. Selma was intensively obsessed with religion and always tried to enforce her negative obsession on her daughter. She was always gloomy and constantly complaining in nature. Peri, on the other hand, was like her father – rational. They were not looking to mend the torn-out bridges.

Peri was the youngest and unwanted child of her parents, but in spite of this fact she was loved by the whole family. She had a very strong bond with her father, even she had her first taste of alcohol with her father at the age of eight. Peri used to sit with her father for hours and they share their views on God. She never had

such deep meaning chats and discussions with her mother. And of course, she shared her secrets with her father first. Peri had a view of the baby in the mist when she was eight, and she decided to reveal this secret to father.

Three Daughters of Eve and shows that female subjectivity in the novel is generally owned by female characters who are westernized or have received a Western education. In other words, there is an uplift of gender discourse through a Western perspective as seen in the domination of westernized female characters and through the setting of places presented in the novel. Oxford is imaged as a city full of memories, a city with the best quality of higher education in the world, and as a symbol of a civilization that is far better than Istanbul. Istanbul on the other hand, is described as a city dominated by masculinity and patriarchal culture with its various complexities and problems. The issue of gender in the novel Three Daughters of Eve is closely related to religion. Religion in this case is not described as a one-faced discourse, but as a discourse that is close to differences and diversity. As a consequence, there is a clash of understanding as voiced by the characters in the novel regarding gender issues. Analysis of the polyphonic characteristics of the novel Three Daughters of Eve shows that there are at least two groups of voices that dominantly respond to gender issues. The dualism or ambiguity of the text towards gender equality is seen from the perspective of groups that subject and objectify women in front of the dominant discourse of patriarchy. The discussion in this section describes the gender issues that arise in the Muslim community of Istanbul and the Muslim community in Oxford and their relation to the positioning of women in realizing or delaying gender equality.

Although in general the novel shows the existence of gender equality between women and men as manifested in the characterizations, there are still some gender problems in the novel. These problems do not occur directly between the characters who are dominantly displayed in the novel, but rather in relation to the Muslim community in Istanbul at large. In other words, problems that arise regarding gender relations in novels are generally not carried out by the characters described above, but by the wider community who have internalized patriarchal values. Barlas (2019) argues that there is no distinction between men and women in the Koran as there is no distinction between the roles of the two in the public and private spheres. This lack of distinction is actually illustrated through the characterizations in the novel as described above. But on the other hand, there are also criticisms of the problems that lead to the birth of inequality as described in the Muslim society of Istanbul.

The novel Three Daughters of Eve features a female character who is not only strong and intelligent but also a character who has a spirit of activism in various social activities. Among the figures who can be considered to have militancy in voicing teachings originating from religion is Selma. Selma is depicted in the novel not only as an ordinary female character, but also able to manifest these views and understandings in the form of action. One of the actions that Selma routinely takes in realizing her religious understanding is by carrying out da'wah to remind women who sunbathe on the beach wearing bikinis about sins and their consequences in the afterlife.

The quote describes the da'wah that Selma did by visiting the beaches in Istanbul. He does it with like-minded people. The phrase "with a circle of like-minded spirits" here shows the collectivity of a group in channeling their religious understanding. Selma and her friends think that a woman who wears a bikini on the beach commits a sin and must repent. Some scary and horrific phrases were written in the leaflets they distributed, such as "every inch of flesh you show today will scorch you in hell tomorrow". This encourages the creation of discomfort and triggers conflict in the individual or group who is the object of his da'wah because he judges them and thinks that what they are doing by sunbathing on the beach is wrong and against religious teachings as understood by Selma. Selma and her friends are described here as a group of people who are fanatical about the teachings and understanding of their religion because they are militant in realizing their desire to shape their environment in such a way as they perceive as true and good. In contrast to Selma, Mona is depicted in the novel as a character who likes to carry out campaign activities about the Islamic feminism movement in Oxford. From the quote below, it can be seen that Mona is not just a woman who has thoughts, but is also able to manifest her thoughts in the form of actions to give a wider influence. Moreover, the campaign is aimed at providing space for Muslim women to be able to obtain their rights specifically, and for all women in various parts of the world to be seen as equal without discrimination, subordination, and oppression.

There are several important points that can be observed from the quote above. Mona's expression, which reads if you are with me, sign our petition shows that Mona has the ability to influence other students at Oxford. She is not only described as a student who only learns in class, but also as an activist who is aggressively voicing the feminism movement. Mona's activism spirit can be seen from Mona joining the Oxford Feminist squad and her enthusiasm in voicing her opinion through action. Apart from organizing the campaign, Mona also revealed that she also enjoys writing hip-hop songs. For her, writing hip-hop songs is a way to free women from the shackles. The lyrics of the song he wrote were to express anger and disappointment against injustice and inequality.

Mona is not only described as a woman with an activism spirit who has special attention to gender issues or feminism. He also has the ability to write songs and make the song into a song that is able to deceive

himself. This can be seen at least in his speech which states that his activity of writing hip-hop songs is an empowering activity. From the description above, it can be understood that the women in the novel *Three Daughters of Eve* are presented differently from the stereotypes of Muslim women in general. The female characters in the novel are presented as figures who are not only intelligent and clever, but are able to channel their thoughts in the form of action. The action is then campaigned to spread influence in the surrounding environment. Through this act of activism, women are described as having subjectivity and being able to place themselves on a par with men. This is as found in the reading of the discourse on gender equality in Islam in the Al-Quran. The Quran in this context does not use sex or gender as something that discriminates, oppresses, or positions women as the Other. In essence, men and women are subjects of their own choice and will. Women and men should be freed from various shackles or oppression caused by patriarchal culture. Both, men and women are equal creatures before God, so it makes no sense if both are equal before God, but are seen as different and inferior to the others in front of humans.

The problem of gender relations that does not show equality between men and women generally does not occur directly by the characters who are depicted dominantly in the novel. Although the quote below at a glance is a dialogue between Elves and Mensur, the talk they basically revolve around problems that arise from society at large. This problem once again occurs in the community or does arise from the Istanbul society itself, the impact of which can be experienced by novel characters. One of the problems that can be seen is related to the expectations of Turkish society towards educated women. People who are described as men here are said to be reluctant to marry women who are too smart or have a high educational background. This is considered a problem for Mensur because the wider community, especially men, will put Peri in a difficult position and Mensur does not want his daughter to be a spinster.

The first is the depiction of men as a gender who can demand something freely, even in a private sphere. This can be seen from the expression that men do not want women to be too smart and educated. The second is the positioning of women as a gender that is expected to be able to fulfill what men want. This second problem can be seen from the depiction of women who are expected by men and from the wishes that Mensur expects from the Fairy. As a man who gives subjectivity to the Elves, Mensur is described as unlike typical Arab or Middle Eastern men in general. With his progressive thinking, he educates his daughters on an equal footing with men. However, as a minority group in Arab society, Mensur has to deal with the conventions that apply in his society that women must be subordinate to and dependent on men. Mensur realizes that giving subjectivity to the Elves can have its own consequences. One of them is as presented in the form of Mensur's anxiety if one day the Fairy will have difficulty getting a husband. From the description above, it can be seen that there is still a fact that women are still dominated by men. Women's perspective is still determined and oppressed by the thoughts of someone who overshadows them. Mensur realizes that he as a man is trying to free Peri from oppression and oppression in the family circle. But the consequences that will be found later tend to come from

from society at large. From this it can be seen that there are at least two layers in patriarchal culture, namely the deepest layer as happened in the family context and the outer layer which includes society. Mensur in this case realizes that he can determine the future of his daughter, but he is still in one mechanism of the patriarchal system of society. Therefore, Mensur always feels overshadowed by anxiety about the consequences that will befall his daughter.

Mensur's progressive upbringing is the possibility that her daughter will not find a husband. Mensur didn't want Peri to be a spinster because he was worried that no man would marry her. The mention of spinster or spinster here becomes a problem because it can be interpreted with the connotation of a woman who is despicable and pathetic. Women are depicted as unable to be independent and need men to be happy and prosperous, and as if women have their own time limit. Another gender issue found in the novel relates to the discourse on the importance of virginity for an unmarried woman. Having previously mentioned that there was a debate between Shirin, Mona, and Peri about this, this issue was presented precisely at the moment after the wedding party of Hakan and his wife, Feride. Hakan looks furious when he finds out his wife is not a virgin. Even anyone who approached and asked Hakan about the problem, then Hakan treated him verbally harshly. One of the characters who asked about the noise at that night was the Fairy who was then responded with harsh words. When the commotion began to spread and Feride's extended family found out, a heated argument between Hakan and the bride's family ensued.

Feride's mother who initially distrusted her own child when her virginity was doubted then turned around and said that Hakan do is dirty his daughter. Hakan is considered to have tarnished Feride after he spread slander and said carelessly that Feride was not a virgin. Feride's mother's statement in the next sentence in the name of God further shows how important a woman's virginity is, not only for the man who marries her, but also in God's eyes. For him, virginity is a symbol of the purity and integrity of women who are destined for their husbands after a legal marriage. Therefore, words or allegations directed at a woman that she is not a virgin becomes a disgrace and is a form of humiliation. It can be seen from the quote above that virginity is also associated with religious teachings. The two parties who are arguing above, namely Hakan and the Feride

family, are described in the novel as very religious and religious figures. Thus, it can be said that the arguments they convey are actually not merely their personal thoughts, but also part of the religious understanding they accept which emphasizes the importance of virginity. It is undeniable that there are still many patriarchal Muslim communities who have a similar understanding.

‘Education is important, but there’s something far more important for a girl, you understand? If you lose that, no diploma will redeem you. Boys have nothing to lose. Girls need to be extra careful.’ ‘Right ...’ Peri said, as she averted her gaze. Virginity, that shibboleth that could only be alluded to and not spelled out. It loomed large in many a conversation between mothers and daughters, aunts and nieces. A subject to be tiptoed around, like a moody sleeper in the middle of the room no one dared to disturb. (hlm. 100)

The quote above illustrates that virginity is one of the most important things for women, even more than the importance of education. This was conveyed by another religious figure, namely Selma. The depiction in the previous quote shows that this understanding of the importance of virginity is believed by groups of figures who are described as conservative, such as Selma, Hakan, and the Feride family. This group really views the importance of virginity more than anything else, including education. Even education is meaningless if a woman has lost her virginity. This virginity is once again associated with men. The two are compared as if women have a burden more than men. If a woman loses it, it will be disastrous for her. Therefore, she should have extra caution. This is different from men who tend to be free and don't need to be vigilant like women do. The question that needs to be raised from this problem is where does such a teaching come from and for what? Another interesting thing to observe from the quote above is about the conversation about virginity itself. It is described above that the topic of female virginity is often discussed by women, be it mothers, daughters, aunts, or nieces. Virginity is not only constructed as something big and important for men, but also for women. This can be interpreted as an internalization of patriarchal values that have been embedded in women. Women have an obligation to maintain their virginity not only for themselves, but for their husbands as an offering after a legal marriage according to religion. This understanding can indeed be implanted under the pretext of morality, but it is important to also ask questions regarding whose interests this understanding is disseminated. An understanding of the importance of maintaining virginity certainly places women in a heavier position than men. Moreover, it was not done for the benefit of women themselves. Virginity, which is actually a woman's private business, in this case is no longer her personal business, but is the business of other men and women more broadly. If the previous explanation shows the position of women in the novel as the subject, women in some of the quotes above are described otherwise. Women are not seen as independent subjects, but as objects who have roles and duties to devote themselves to their husbands. This view that places women in a lower position than men can be interpreted as a reflection of the spread of religious understanding and teachings originating from sacred sources which are interpreted through misogynistic and patriarchal readings. Therefore, women are still trapped in the domination of masculinity and patriarchal culture as found in Istanbul society.

As a novel that raises religion and gender as the main issues, this novel shows some basic problems rooted in religious problems. Islam in the novel is described as a religion based on the Al-Quran and Hadith which is polysemic and open to various interpretations. This problem also affects gender discourse in Islam. Islam, in this case, shows a different response to gender problems found in Muslim societies which are generally rooted in the culture of a patriarchal society. On the one hand, Islam is described as a religion that liberates women and places women in an equal position like men. But on the other hand, there are other gender issues that cannot be denied. Groups of liberal figures who uphold critical thinking and do not easily accept dogmatic teachings then question several religious issues related to gender. These issues include the theological aspects of the concept of God as a masculine or feminine figure, as well as the role of Islam itself for women.

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