# Shafak's Treatment of Divinity and Religion in *Three Daughters of Eve*: A Critical Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The current study is an attempt to analyzethe portrayal and treatment of religious ideologyand theme of divinity in ElifShafak's'Three Daughters of Eve' from the perspective of Fairclough's model (1989) of critical discourse analysis. The study hypothesized that the narrator's linguistic choices and embedded voices of different characters in the novel, represent their ideologies, beliefs and disbeliefs about religion and God. Passages bearing religious ideologies and standpoints were purposefully selected and analyzedto reveal the voice of different characters of the novel. The selected passages were analyzed on the three levels i.e. description (text analysis), interpretation (processing analysis) and explanation (social analysis). The study contributes to strengthenthe interface between language and literature through critical discourse analysis of the selected novel.

**Key Words:** Critical Discourse Analysis, religious ideology, divinity, language, literature

## Introduction

The paper presents a critical investigation of religious thoughts, doubts and uncertainties about divinity and theconcepts related to God which are discursively represented in ElifShafak's'Three Daughters of Eve'. The study focuses on the issue of religious beliefs in differentsituations in modern Turkish society.Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) plays a significant role to decipher

the implicit ideologieswoven in the text by the author through the application of multiple verbal strategies. Fairclough (1995) stated that the aim of CDA is 'to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts and (b) wider social structures, relations and processes, to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggle over power, and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony' (p. 132).

It can be observed that speeches, media reports, news editorials, novels, short stories and all types of other texts are pregnant with specific ideologies which are not always obvious to the readers. Gee (1999) opines that we take specific viewpoint about what the world around us is like when we produce a text in the form of speech or writing (p.2).Furthermore, language can be used for communication and for controlling people's perspectives. In other words, according to Kress and Hodge (1993), language is 'an instrument of control as well as communication' (p.6). Critical discourse analysis helps in unveiling such implicit perspectives which people are unaware of (Fairclough, 1989). The agenda of critical analysis is to probe into the 'hidden determinants' and 'hidden effect' in sociocultural situation(Fairclough, 2001, p.4). Critical analysis of discourse is significant in analytical studies as it explores the link among language, ideology and identity. Fairclough's(1995) CDA model comprises three dimensions of discourse at level of description (of the text), interpretation (of the context) and explanation (of the socio-cultural factors), giving a three-layered method for discourse analysis.

## Shafak's Treatment of Religion

Faith, religion, and God are the subjects of intense intellectual curiosity and lead to stimulating and intriguing questions. ElifShafak deals with these sensitive subjects along with feminism, politics and socio-cultural identity in her incredible and ingenious novel 'Three Daughters of Eve'(Guinness, 2017). Even she was put on trial in Turkey for venturing into such sensitivedomains. Charles (2017) in his review on 'The Washington Post' says that ElifShafak's new novel exposes such a timely convergence of today's issues that it seems almost diviner. 'Sexual harassment, Islamist terrorism, the rising tension between the faithful and the secular, and the gaping chasm between the rich and the poor — all play out in the pages of 'Three Daughters of Eve' (Charles, 2017). Holloway (2017) observes thatShafak deals with the subject of religion without any superficiality, retaining a sense of its unviable possibility or its viable impossibility. 'Three Daughters of Eve'is an outstandingachievement. The current study identifies construction of religion, questions about religious thought and existence of God and conflict prevailing in the novel related to this subject of divinity through Fairclough's model.Different character's 'voices' in the selected work project religious ideologies of 'the sinner, the

believer and the confused'. Shafak has been successful in prophesying religious beliefs and the ways to construct the image of God in the novel. To quote her, 'I am interested in the dance between belief and doubt. I am not a religious person in any sense. In reality, I do not like organized religions nor collective identities, but I am spiritual in my own way. I have respect for both faith and doubt. People like me - agnostics, heterodox mystics and humanists - are a minority in Turkey. But we exist and are able to challenge this duality between atheism and absolute religiousness.' (ANSA Med)

## Objectives of the study

The objective of the study is to observe how linguistic choices categorize the ideology of religion in the selected novel. It also probes into the ideological stances of the Turkish young generation with respect to religion and God.

## Research Questions

This study aims to address the following specific questions:

1. What kind of status or position is awarded to God by different characters in 'Three Daughters of Eve'?
2. What type of linguistic choices Shafak has employed to portray religion and God?
3. How does the employment of linguistic structures mirror the outlook of Turkish community in the novel regarding religion?

## Research Methodology

The present study is a critical analysis of Shafak's novel 'Three Daughters of Eve'applying Fairclough's (1989) three dimensional model of analysis. As primary text-data, excerpts from the conversations of four main characters of the novel,i.e. Salema, Mensur, Peri and Azur, were purposefully selected and analyzed. The selected passages were studied at textual level focusing on lexical choices employed by the author to portray religious ideologies of the characters. The selected text then was further interpreted at explanation (context analysis) and interpretation (social analysis) levels.

## Literature Review

The subject matter of the current study is unique in its concern as it works to find out the themesof religious identity and God's position projected in the widely read genre of fiction. Novels can be adequately taken as examples of discursive discourse practice. Bakhtin (1935) in his ground breaking work 'Discourse in the Novel' distinguishes novel as a dialogic discourse with multiplicity of voices. He calls these voices as heteroglossia that includes perspective and ideology of the characters.We can derive meanings of a novel by reading and evaluating thisheteroglossia in novels.Shafak in her novel 'Three Daughters of Eve' has discursively encoded her ideology of Islamization in the backdrop of modern day Turkey. Considerable research has been carried out previously under the aegis of critical discourse analysis using Fairclough's

model to uncover ideologies in different political and social discourses including novels. Sadeghi, Hasssani, &Ghorbani (2014) discovered Islamic ideology in the political discourse of Imam Khomeini's Will by using Fairclough's three layered framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

The contemporary Pakistani feminist author Sidhwa encodes Parsi religion in her novel 'Cracking India'. The religious family is trying to restore their religious honor and save their lives from the degrading position in society. The novel mainly deals with the exploitation and social issues in Pakistani society like Shafak's characters are prone to in modern Turkey. Shafak and Sidhwa deal with gender identity, race, religion and ethnic issues of different contexts. The protagonists from the novels of both the authors have the same social issues, as Peri has religious issues and Zaitoon is victimized by the hands of patriarchal system in Pakistan. Similarly, Dar (2013) opines that in 'Ice Candy Man', Lenny is shown in struggle for religious identity in the entire novel like Peri in 'Three Daughters of Eve'.

Kazemi&Dalaee (2017) studied ZoyaPirzad's two novels applying Fairclough's model of analysis. They revealed that the novel portrayed the ideology and power of patriarchy and its effects on female characters in the novel. Applying CDA, Sipra& Rashid (2013) revealed that social, cultural and political discriminations are highlighted in the text of Martin Luther King's speech 'I Have a Dream'. This political speech is analyzed in socio political and historical contexts and it portrays the ideology of King through linguistic choices in speech. Rizwan, Saeed, &Fayaz (2013) studied the discourses of mourning called 'Marsyia' by using Fairclough's model. They concluded that such types of discourses contain highly rhetoric language and specific background ideologies to arouse emotions in the hearts of the audience. Imtiaz (2015) analyzed Mohsin Hamid's 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' through CDA.He argued that this novel painted a real picture of Western and Muslim world. To highlight trust gap between the East and the West in the aftermath of 9/11 incident is the ideology encoded in this novel.Zaib& Bhatti (2017) explored Kamila Shamsi's'Burnt Shadows'from the perspective Critical Discourse Analysis. They concluded that this novel is written in the context of 9/11 incident presents the Eastern view of the incident, extremism, decolonization, religion and globalization.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

The narrator's words and embedded voices of different characters in the novel represent their ideologies, beliefs and disbeliefs about religion and God.

## Selma: A Staunch Believer

### Extracts

(1)Every inch of flesh you show today will scorch you in hell tomorrow... (2)Animated though she always was, Selma had become even more talkative and argumentative in this new stage of her life, keen to

bring others, especially her husband, to the path of the righteous. (3) Given that Mensur had no intention of being corrected, the Nalbantoglu house-hold was divided into her zone and his zone – Dar al-Islam and Dar al- harp – the realm of submission and the realm of war (p.20).

## Description

In the above extract, expressions loaded with ideological connotations are used to portray religious beliefs and ideological stance. The lexical items i.e. 'flesh', 'today', 'scorch', 'hell', 'tomorrow', represent the belief in religious concept of life hereafter and God. The second person pronoun 'you' refers to all human beings. The nouns 'today' and 'tomorrow' are allusively used to refer to the concept of this world and hereafter. Selma is Peri's mother. She is portrayed as a devoted Muslim with a staunch belief in Allah and the world hereafter. The choice of modal verb 'will' makes a strong assertion about the world hereafter. The words 'scorch' and 'flesh' refer to the idea of physical punishment promised to the sinners. The words 'life', 'keen', 'bring', 'especially', 'path' and 'righteous' relate to the idea about religious ideology. The pronoun 'she' refers to Selma. The word 'husband' is used as noun represents Peri's father Mensur. The extracts bear different linguistic choices that indicate religious values and beliefs. The use of lexical items such as 'divided' and 'zone', indicate the partition of ideas between the husband and the wife about religion. This difference of ideology is represented through concrete compound noun 'Dar al-

Islam' and 'Dar al-harp'.The words 'Dar al-Islam' and 'Dar al-harp' are mixture of three words and are used to give a comprehensive religious idea.

## Interpretation and Explanation

These extracts from the novel are part of a conversation of Peri's mother. These sentences form a complete and comprehensive ideological viewpoint of Selma about her belief in God and good and evil. The discourse process of Selma reveals her belief in religion and the outcome of good and evil and the idea to be answerable in Hereafter. She makes an aphoristic statement about 'today', and 'tomorrow', the two worlds that human beings prepare their worlds by their actions. The terminologies related to scorching of flesh indicate that the mother strongly believe that her daughter Peri would suffer eternal turmoil if she does not refrain from not taking hijab and showing off her body. Her Islamic ideology centers on both worlds as she reveals that in this world when a female does not cover her body then she will have to face 'scorches' in the next. There is a reference to Selma's husband Mensur. He is portrayed as one of the disbelievers in the novel. Selma is represented as a preacher who is very strong and argumentative to bring her husband to the 'righteous' path, the path of virtue in Islam. Overall, the discourse constructs the characters of Peri's parents which refers to the social cognition in the modern Turkish society. The narration symbiotically explains the two different ways of life of the two parents in the form of 'realm of submission and the realm of war'.

## Mensur: The Secular

(5) "I have no sympathy for religion, or for the religious, but you know why I'm still fond of God?" (6) "Because He is lonely, Pericim, like me… like you,' Mensur replied. (7) "All alone up there somewhere, no one to talk to- okay, maybe a few angels, but just how much fun can you have with the cherubim?"

## Description

The above discourse is between Peri and her father Mensur. These extracts lead to develop the idea of secularism and prefigure the image of God in the mind of the character. Mensur tells Peri that he has 'no sympathy for religion', and he rephrases it as 'for the religion' using the definite article. He is referring to the religion of Islam. He chooses the word to be 'fond of God' rather than a believer or worshipper. The choice reveals the secular character of Mensur. He describes the reason of his fondness of God saying that He is 'All alone' and that He is 'somewhere', not portraying his belief in the presence or existence of God. He further says that 'no one' talks to God, only a 'few angels', and adds that 'just how much fun can you have with the cherubim'.

First person pronoun 'I' is used by the writer to give strong voice to the speaker. Third person pronoun 'He' with capitalized 'H' is used for the 'God' in Islam. These extracts of the fictional discourse construct religious thoughts, beliefs and ideology by mingling of different religious words, phrases, pronouns, nouns and adjectives.

## Interpretation and Explanation

This fictional discourse reflects on the theme of religion and focalizes Mensur as a skeptic person. He is clearly portrayed and voiced as a secular person. He is not being hybrid or confused like his daughter, neither is he a staunch or blind believer like his wife. He is questioning God's status and position. He is insisting to learn something more about God and Peri's approach towards Him. The character clearly says that he has no sympathetic feelings for religion. This indicates that he associates religion purely with feelings and emotions rather than with rationality or reasoning. In the same clause he used the cohesive conjunction 'but'showing his stance about God i.e. 'but I'm still fond of God'. It shows the skeptic nature of Mensur. Moreover, the ideological construction of religious thoughts and reservation of the status of God represented in figurative language. The third person pronoun 'He' is used for God's identity. The pronoun 'me' in social context is used for Peri's Father and 'you'for Peri. The word 'lonely' is used for God Almighty, and 'Pericim' is for Peri's ideology and lonely nature.Mensur further narrates his belief about God's representation as He is alone like Peri and other human beings in the universe. Mensur'sconception of God shows he believes God has limited Him with a 'few angels'. The noun 'cherubim' is used allusively for the angels who are God's company according to the revealed religions. The discourse mainly demonstrates secular and pessimistic approach of Peri's father,

Mensur. The discourse producer constructs complex sentence (sentence 8) to show the complex nature of religion as perceived by Mensur.

## Peri: The Confused

(1) "It was around those days Peri began to reframe her relationship with Allah". (2)"She stopped praying before going to sleep, contrary to the way her mother thought her, but she also refused to remain indifferent towards the Almighty, contrary to her father's advice". (P.33)

## Description

The above extracts consist of different types of related vocabulary and linguistic choices to vocalize Peri's belief about religion. Peri is portrayed as the one trying to 'reframe' her 'relationship' with 'Allah (Almighty)'. She 'stopped praying' to 'Almighty' before 'sleep', 'contrary' to what her 'mother taught' her. But she 'refused' to 'remainindifferent''towards the Almighty''contrary' to her father's point of view. Different linguistic choices reveal that Peri is in doubt, she is torn apart brooding about the two wings to decide which the path of peace is and what to follow of the concerned religion.

## Interpretation and Explanation

The above extracts represent Peri's belief and relationship with God. These extracts specifically refer to the critical time in Peri's life when she began to question God and His position in the lives of human beings. Unlike her father and mother who are at extreme positions regarding religion,

Peri is in a hybrid state. At times she is trying to reframe her relationship with God, but at other times she is in a transient state of belief. Her religious rituals and prayers are like a transparent picture, and she visualize God's picture to create questions. The questions in her mind are not for the clarification of religion but to search a way for adaptation. The word 'Almighty' is used for God's power, and Peri unconsciously recognizes the superiority of God's position and status. Peri is trying to find out Muslims' identity which her mother is preaching to her in daily routine of their life. In the current position, she is emotionally in anger towards God and religion. Again in the same sentence, she is trying to conceal her 'anguish' and 'voice' in social context. According to Bakhtin(1981), researchers can study 'voices' with different perspectives and ideology. 'Voice' is an implicit approach is social context, as voice represents different types of inner feelings and imaginations. Peri's'voice' is implicit in the current discourse. She is in a confused state of mind, can't disclose her inner self in front of her parents as she knows their extreme yet conflicting ideologies of the two.

## Extracts

(3) "She was my best friend; Peri thought to herself but refrained from saying it". (4) "She and Mona and I". (5) "The three of us: the sinner, the believer, the Confused". (p.152)

## Description

The above extracts contain a range of relational, experiential and expressive values

concerning Fairclough's (1989) grammar. The above discourse is ideologically loaded with religious thoughts. The speaker is Peri. She uses different expressions and words as 'best friend', 'thought to herself', and 'refrained'. The phrase 'the three of us' refers to Peri and her two female friends Mona and Shirin, as 'the sinner', 'the believer', and 'the confused'. Personal pronouns are used multiple times in the above extracts. 'She' for Shirin, the reflexive pronoun 'herself' for Peri, 'She' for Shirin (as Shirin left them), 'I' for Peri, and 'us' for the three friendsindicate the sinner, the believer and the confused in ideological construction. The abstract nouns 'sinner' represents Shirin, 'believer' Mona and 'confused' the protagonist Peri. The definite article 'the' is used specifically to refer to a particular religious ideology, and separates the three daughters from the rest of the characters.

## Interpretation and Explanation

The above extracts constitute a significant discursive practice through the voice of the protagonist of the novel. As discussed earlier, Peri is in between two states of mind. In the above lines she calls herself 'confused' to showcase her inability to decide about the ways of the religion. The other two friends, Mona and Shirin, are portrayed at two extreme opposing ends of religious ideologies. One is sinner, the other, believer. The confused state of the protagonist is brought to the focus by this comparison.

## Azur's Assumption of 'Certainty'

### Extracts

We have seen, all too often, that neither theists nor atheists are ready to abandon the Hegemony of Certainty…(3) An old man stood up. (4) May I ask the distinguished scholars if they have a favorite poem on God, whether they believe in Him or not?(p. 178)

## Description

The above discourse contains vocabulary and grammar mentioned in Fairclough's (1989) theoretical framework, with reference to the description of any text. Different types of words, phrases and linguistic choices are used such as 'We have seen', 'too often', 'theists nor atheists', 'Hegemony and Certainty' , 'An old man', 'May I ask', 'distinguished scholars', 'favorite poem on God', 'believe on Him or not'. The subordinating connectors 'if' and 'whether' are used for the purpose of forming a dependent clause for the distinguish 'scholars'. Particular linguistic items are used for the portrayal of the sense of religious ideology as 'God exists', 'theists', 'atheists', 'poem on God', etc. The nouns 'theists' and 'atheists' represent two concepts about the presence and existence of God. The capital 'H' in the pronoun refers to Almighty God. The structure of the last sentence is complex in nature, with two subordinate clauses,representing the complex phenomenon discussed in the novel.

## Interpretation and Explanation

The ideology presented in the above extract is intricate and the speaker discursively constructs an idea about God's

identity, His status and position. The writer has used the character of Professor Azur to record the perception of God in the minds of 'intelligent people'. Azur's voice echoes the concept regarding religion thatmost of the enlightened and educated people carry in modern Turkish society.Azur puts God at a supreme position. Azur'sbelief and construction of thought about the position of God is that of All-Powerful, because he refers to the theory of 'Certainty'. Certainty is an epistemic theory which holds that there is no rationale behind rejecting a particular belief if it is incapable of entertaining any falsity (Reed 2011). Azur builds up the idea that God's position can certainly be accepted because there is no other entity which can possibly nullify this belief. He further develops this idea that after all, 'theists' and 'atheists' believe on 'certainty'. All the believers and non-believers leave this modern world with the faith of belief or secular ideas with 'certainty'.

## Extract

"I have learned so much from God
That I can no longer call myself
A Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Jew
The Truth has shared so much of itself with me
That I can no longer call myself
a man, a woman, an angel or even a pure soul…
"Religion is a fairy tale for those who are afraid of the dark"

(pp.179-180)

## Description

The present piece of literature is a poetic expression of Professor Azur in a seminar on the topic of theology. Azur starts with the introduction of different religions, for this purpose he narrates the poetic lines of great Persian poet Hafez. In the very first line Azur, reflects himself that not just 'I' but we must 'learn' whatever 'God'has chosen for the entire world. Here, he neglects rather refutes the beliefs made by the non-believers, and gives the reference of God. He shows through poetry that 'I have learned' myself whatever belongs to any of religion. Further, he negates if there is any difference between different religions and says that 'I do not call myself a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Jew' anymore.

## Interpretation and Explanation

The above extract of poetry from the narrative is an ideological construction on the topic of theology. Professor Azur artistically constructs the idea about the truth of God and existence of human beings. Professor Azur alludes to the great Persian poet Hafez by translating a few of his lines. In the seminar,Azur represents ideology of religions and position and status of God in different religions to give an implicit message to the audience from different cultures. In the current situation these believers neglect one another's ideology and lifestyle of any other religion with immortal hate, but Azure is trying to far off this gap of religions and sects and goes to the ultimate 'Truth' i.e. the presence of Almighty God.

**Conclusion**

The study focused investigating construction of religious ideology in the narrative. Fictional narratives are significant discourses to construe particular national and religious ideologies. Cook (1990) opined that any sort of language use, from groans and conversations to fiction can be considered as discourse. Hence, the selected fictional work is studied as a critical discourse from the perspective of Fairclough's three dimension model of CDA to unveil religious ideologies and truth of God's existence behind voices of different characters in the text. Different characters represented their religious ideologies in 'Three Daughters of Eve'. The overall analysis investigated different voices in different contexts. Peri, Salema, Mensur and Azure's religious thoughts, and beliefs have been analyzed. Shafak constructs and unveils religious issues in modern Istanbul through fiction.

The analysis has revealed the multicultural impact on modern Turkish society. The three daughters include Shirin, an Iranian feminist, Mona, an Egyptian American and Peri, the Turkish who were put together in the class of Azur who taught them a course titled 'God'.Peri is confused as modern Turkey is torn with traditional religious and modern secular beliefs. She represents the rift going on in the Turkish society between the liberals with no or least interest in religion and the people with religious faith.Peri is the product of that rift, which she has faced throughout her life in the form of her father who represents the secular Turkey and her mother who is an

exponent of religious Turkey. The result is drastic when Peri is compared to the world outside Turkey, in the garb of Shirin and Mona. Though both again represent two extremes yet none of them is confused and torn apart between two varying ideologies regarding religion and the existence of God.

To conclude, 'Three Daughters of Eve' is a marvelous lesson in multiculturalist angst, the clash between modernity and tradition, and the vicissitudes of personal struggle.' (Faruqi, 2020). In an interview with the ANSA Med, talking on her very novel, she opined that Turkey is a t the verge of Europe, and is a divided society between fundamentalists and liberals. She adds that this because Europe does not welcome us and we have to stand with the East, and that would be dangerous. The same philosophy is reflected in her novel 'Three Daughters of Eve'.

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