

The Unpalatable Anthropological Truth of Fusun and Sibel's Journey (Turkish Female Identity) Through Kemal's Museum Amidst the Generational Existentialism: The Quest of the Protagonists refiguring Consciousness and Reality in the New Emerged Cultural Chaos in Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*

Ila, Dr. Shruti Rawal

Research Scholar, Assistant Professor

Department of English

IIS Deemed to be University

Jaipur

guptaila5@gmail.com

Abstract:

The paper explores the protagonists on the quest refiguring consciousness and reality because of the new emerged culture and its chaos. It also studies the psyche of lovers and nature of their love in the contemporary times through Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*. The author's craft puts the lovers in comparison with already existing love tales like that of Jane Austen. It is a discourse of study of the formation of identity of the Turkish heroine and hero at the same time through the pressures of an Islamic, secular and western society through the concept of "self" and "other" that keeps the nation and its individual in a dilemma. The conundrum of identity amidst cultural chaos is explored in the novel.

Keywords: quest of protagonists', new emerged culture, new woman, Museum- an aesthetic love symbol

Feminism is a socio-political stance employed to study the cultural practices of arts and literature. The status of a woman is determined by her economic security. People make religion as a political and social tool to exploit woman. The gender inequality emerges out of the set conventional cultural practices. Turkey is a country that has a unique beautiful but conflicting geographical position that Turkey lies partly in Asia and partly in Europe acting as both the barrier and a bridge between the two countries. The geographical position has given Turkey's lifestyle and society a mutational change which has a long lasting impact on every aspect of its people, society, culture, religious sentiments, politics and literature. The novel has a clash between Eastern and Western influences on Turkish society and lifestyle. Most of the countries had their cultures dominated by other cultures; predominantly, it had been Eurocentric shift. Europe has a larger than life impact on Pamuk's literary works. The Ottomans ruled the nation for six centuries but the evolving Turkish culture emerged a "new woman" who has been in a dilemma of modernization as she was provided with western education but struggling with Islamic norms. The Kemalist Cultural Revolution proved to be a total break from the Ottoman Islamic past. Turkey as a European secular example abolished the Ottoman rule changed the written language, the dress code, time, and the calendar.

Orhan Pamuk is a well known contemporary literary figure who is a Turkish and Nobel Laureate as well. He comes from an affluent Islamic family but a declining one which has shaped his personality as a writer and has influenced his works naturally. He spent his childhood at apartment in Nisantasi, the references have been many in his works like this novel *Istanbul: Memories and the City* and *The Black Book* too other than the novel of study in this paper. Pamuk is a self defined "Cultural Muslim", and he does not believe in the traditional notion of the Islam and he sketches Kemal the protagonist similarly. This paper endeavors at exploring the

space of women and man in *The Museum of Innocence* and ask larger questions like what it takes to be a man and woman in this part of the world. The discourse of the clash of the two alternative cultures has become a topic of intense debate. The power with which the author writes “other” produces a chaos in his art and “it is with this privileged resource that he escapes into that second world of his lifelong desire-the world of imagination, the invention of which has been his sole quest in life” (Yilmaz 126). The protagonist Kemal, Fusun are the examples of “Other” who loss themselves in the world of imagination and later on pushes the hero to construct the “Museum”. The journey to this museum is the essential study of the paper.

Love should be a personal matter but Pamuk uncovers the reality by asking significant question of love between ‘equals’ in regards with social strata of the society. One of his characters becomes his spokesperson and quotes, “The art of love is in finding the balance of equals” (*The Museum of Innocence*, Pamuk). Pamuk discards the idea of social status in relation with love and his character look for fulfillment and platonic love rather than matching the social concerns. There is sexual element attached with his love aspect. Happiness is a question of individual aspect for author and not fits into the social way of looking always. It can be rightly said about Pamuk’s love that it is just the opposite of Jane Austen’s love. Pamuk questions the so understood ‘moral concern’ and through social encounters he evokes the idea of overwhelming love. His characters evolve and leave behind the stereotypical deficient norms set by society. The characters set out on a quest that shows his characters attribute as strong and weak but overpowering. This causes disaster for all.

The novel opens up in the backdrop of Istanbul city. The author begins his tale in a perfect spring of Istanbul of the year nineteen seventy five. Kemal and Sibel, young generation of affluent families gets engaged. He encounters Füsün who works at a shop and is a distant

relative. He gets attracted to her at the first sight and is enthralled. Kemal gets into a secret relationship with her and they happen to share a deep physical and emotional bond with each other. They keep meeting and he violates the code of virginity with the girl who is also a distant relative. Fusun reveals her deep love for him. Kemal is also in love with her but cannot decide to break or continue any of the relationship with the two girls. His reverie is broken when Fusun decides to move on leaving behind Kemal forever just a day before his wedding. This becomes the turning point as after Fusun's departure he realizes his deep love for her. He tries to fight the feeling and roll with the flow of life yet unsuccessful even after a year. He begins his search for Fusun or it can be said this becomes the onset of his love quest.

The novel is about innocence, guilt and love that refer to Museum and its collection at large. The idea is expanded in the last chapters, that anything associated with Arts and Literature becomes immortal. The novel has a subtheme of the East and the West clash but it is also about modernity and tradition. Pamuk through his novels talk about Turkish Female identity also. The references and influences of the West (Europe and America) on the culture of Turkey dominate the novel. He empowers them through his works and abhors the Hippocratic idea on virginity as taboo and as an old system of Islamic culture. The novel is a blend of all these themes that affect the love tale of the two. The Questors asks larger questions like what it means to be a man or a woman in their part of the world. The society is not open to concepts like love. The sex outside of wedlock is a taboo. Sibel who is Kemal's fiancée and loves him, they are perfect match for each other in the sense that they come from same background. It is an arranged marriage. She gets hurt when she gets to know about Fusun, yet she forgets it and supports Kemal in his depression phase. She doesn't leave his side for quite long, it is Kemal who decides to break the engagement.

Sibel, though has studied in Europe yet is not as modern as Kemal would want her to be. The sub theme of love, courage, modernity and desire is quite dominant in the novel. In the eponymous chapter, the varied nature of the three is portrayed. The following conversation between Fusun, Kemal tells a lot about their dilemma on the idea of making love before marriage. Kemal referring to Sibel says that “She’s studied in Europe, but she’s not as modern and courageous as you are...” (Pamuk 67). After a long silence Kemal tries to answer “what Sibel had done before marriage out of love and trust, Fusun had done out of courage and a modern outlook” (Pamuk 68). Fusun ponders on what Kemal labeled him as and after a long silence says “I am not modern or courageous”, it’s out of unconditional love and trust in Kemal that made her do so, she says, “A woman can love a man like crazy for years without once making love to him” (Pamuk 68). The girls were judged harshly in those days if they violated the rule of virginity and had to face grave consequences. The closing paragraph of this eponymous chapter throws a great deal of self reflection on emotional bond between the two despite all the chaos of modernity and desire for each other.

Sibel had her say on this situation, she being his fiancée questions Kemal “is it normal to leave your fiancée in the lurch...for a shop girl...” she goes to the extent saying that it was nothing but “it’s because she was a poor, ambitious girl that you were able to start something with her so easily” (Pamuk 302). Kemal in reply questions her that “don’t people ever fall in love with people who are poorer than they are? Don’t rich and poor ever fall in love?” Sibel coldly replies to him that “The art of love is in finding the balance of equals” (Pamuk 306). Sibel realizes his behavior towards her, “I am quite sure that you could not be as in love with here now as you were” she said frustratingly, “Your problem is not that you’re in love with another woman it’s that you are not in love with me” (Pamuk 277). Later, after his father’s death, he decides to

call off her engagement with Sibel. They have last conversation where Fusun says after a period of 339 days of live-in that “it’s not love that keeps you close to me it just allows you to continue believing you have survived a disaster” (Pamuk 277). Their relationship became a loveless and indifferent relationship because of loss of faith not in one another but self “may be, because I’ve lost faith in myself... I’ve even lost my looks that are what I think now sometimes” (Pamuk 277). It was after a period of 339 days, that he decided to ask Fusun to marry him. But he comes to know of her marriage through his father and they go to meet her at her place with a broken heart and things going on in his head “ I was shocked...to believe she had no interest in him... I were a well meaning, wealthy cousin, here to give a wedding present to a poor relation, while many more important things weighed on my mind” (Pamuk 327). He expresses his deep regret and sorrow in lines “...it was clear that Fusun and I were made for each other. I had undergone all this anguish on account of this awareness and it did not matter in the least that she was married...” He moans and yearns for her love even more and through the half open window says, “It’s love, its love, the reason for everything in the universe” (Pamuk 334).

Years later, after Fusun’s father’s death Kemal is able to convince her of his love and she divorces her husband. Kemal cherishes the fruit of his labor after nine years and unites with Fusun: “Fusun and I lay side by side, locked in an embrace, for the first time in nine years. I breathed in the scent of her neck, her skin perfumed with the scent that the exertions of drying had released” (Pamuk 610). But Fusun recalls the past gets angry and says “...last night you tricked me. You robbed me of my greatest treasure without benefit of marriage, you took possession of me. And people like you never marry what they’ve already had. That’s the kind of person you are” (Pamuk 664). Kemal promises her that he loved her and wished to have a family

with her. They decide to marry and on their way to Europe the Chevrolet at a good speed hit the tree on the road side. The accident took away his beloved from him forever:

Fusun knew she was about to die, and during those two or three seconds she told me with pleading eyes that she didn't really want to, that she would cling to life as long as she could, hoping for me to save her. But I could only smile at my beautiful fiancée...still so full of vitality... (Pamuk 670).

Months later Kemal recalled the accident details, the various parts of ruined Chevrolet, and the last and short tormenting memory of Fusun. Her pleading eyes told him she did not want to go; she wanted to hold her breath as long as she could. Kemal recovered after months yet Fusun's memory tormented him. Kemal got established a Museum of Innocence/Objects in her memory. All the objects that belonged to Fusun were displayed there to immortalize his love for Fusun.

However, hard it is tried but the emergence of modern influence cannot be denied, Kemal in *The Museum of Innocence* gets torn between his elitist western upbringing and lifestyle. Sibel and Fusun also undergo the same turmoil. The feminist characters keep pondering their place in "new" Turkey fighting their dilemma to choose love or break the taboo to give away virginity before marriage and so on so forth. The class distinction, the growing capitalism and a western way of life makes Kemal's life complex and he is not able to decide timely that his love for Fusun is his breath. He ignores his feelings for her thinking it is his sexual desire and nothing much, he couldn't gather courage to call of his engagement with Sibel. He keeps tossing between the two girls, looks up to Sibel to fill in the void but loves Fusun and later abandons everything in her pursuit.

The complexities of modern western relations are *juxtaposed* with the eastern value system that is certainly not so out dated in a modern world. This is also an ethnographical analysis of exchange between different cultures and races growing social complexity. Fusun and Sibel are Pamuk's strong women characters who are rational and modern; they fight their battle through Islamic biased laws to free themselves of its clutches. The characters revolve around social, moral and political themes. The identity discovered is a fruit of much rumination about the complicated associations of loss, class distinctions, religion, secularity and memories. The role of woman on this quest journey in Pamuk's works cannot be undermined. The lady protagonists are depicted as an allusive woman who probably becomes the call for the hero to undertake the quest in his works. The struggle for woman in the eastern or Islamic countries than the west has always been more difficult. The condition of woman here can be compared to the woman of Victorian society in England. Pamuk becomes the spokesperson of women through these works and mentions that as long as a lady accepts that she is wonderful of all she would not wish to be a man's reflection only. She would need to fly with the wings of her aspirations and dreams.

It forms the identity of an individual and impacts the interpretation of love and realization of love with the beloved. Pamuk portrays the distinctions of religion, nationality; culture and identity are constructed on the foundation of rich Ottoman past and fascination for West. Pamuk is a literary and cultural critic. Pamuk is never preaching or going at extremes to convey a sensitive or political issue, his narration comes across through writing in an unconscious manner. His women character like Fusun is not typified and stereotyped woman of 1970s Istanbul. Fusun and Sibel depict a very different understanding of a feminine consciousness against what happens with them-a very understanding and elegant walk out or staying for that matter. It is not

a collective memory all these characters have but individual sense of belonging that can be marked as Pamuk's standard marker of difference in discourses on identity. The family depicted in the novel live in an urban society of Istanbul, like dead, living side by side for years leading to a sort of societal isolation and emotional as well. The kind of emotions Pamuk show through are pure only at subconscious level and he makes the characters reach there from the superficial surface conscious but only after they have suffered and being forced to examine their own conscience thereby defining their moral selves. The quest for identity is not an easy process in Pamuk's works unlike other quests narratives for language, nation or religion; it is an intertwining of all the binaries in a cosmopolitan world. Osman and others characters in *The New Life* are exterminated on this quest. His novels have impressions of cultural, domestic and private residues with the political, nationalist and ideological nuances that intoxicate how belief is most often considered today.

The exploration of unresolved sense of identity in the middle of this chaos is the chief theme of his works. Turks including author and his families were aware of the changes taking place in Europe. The tales begin at an existential note and address broader socio-personal concerns those tend to be universal. It appears as if the quest has turned into a civilization crisis with so much going on in societies all round the globe, making it relatable and universal. Kemal doesn't appear sick as Osman, with Osman there was a continual foreshadowing of dire changes occurring in society. Kemal sees himself as not being able to fit in his urban society which was his own world. He was being pushed to the periphery of the emotional condition because of love evoked for Fusun which he couldn't understand in the beginning. An encroachment on his consciousness occurs for Sibel (his fiancée). He doesn't want to be forced to imitate the societal Turkish identity in his love and life matters. He gets torn between the practical aspect and

sentimentality for the evoked love. The death of his father bears imprint on him and he frees himself of the bond with Sibel. The sense of loss in life without Fusun is a therapy in learning how to live anew especially when he finds out that she is married and is right in front of him. It provides him a manner to think alternatively about Fusun through objects associated with her in constructing the museum of objects through their innocence. He keeps visiting her and the marriage doesn't break or shift from his love or sense of belonging towards Fusun. Consequently, this becomes a turning point in highly inspired exfoliations of realism and awareness in an unsettled direction to Kemal's experience.

Pamuk stresses upon comprehending identity in how it has been perceived through conventional way of living in urban Turkish society that provided a momentum to reconsider how the protagonist thinks of belonging and how societal ways and pressures force one to associate. In his novels society and intertwining of cultures is seen as very challenging while considering perceptions on realization. It is nicely contemplated and interpreted through the characters of Kemal. The turn in Kemal's life is struck within shifting conventional archetype. This move calls into question long-held concepts and ideals of what it means to dwell in a nation.

The novel by Pamuk allows highly nuanced and introspective degrees of thinking through eastern and western cultures that generates a deconstruction of the class and cultural hierarchy. The author here critiques modern subjectivity while in other works he critiques national identity. The writings move the reader and the human conditions are explored beyond national and cultural identity; his characters don't fit into social, religious or national structures. There is no Shakespearian foreshadowing of the problems but a realistic depiction of chaos brought by European and Turkish ways of life. The differences implied through class, religion or nation tends to blur in his works. Pamuk in all his novels especially this one tends to elevate the status

of women in society. These novels anticipate and remain in the middle of significant and terrible experiences in human history in providing re-evaluations of what it means to be human being in differing cultures across the globe today.

References

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. USA: Heinle&Heinle, 1999.
- Afridi, M., & Buyze, D. (2012). *Global Perspectives on Orhan Pamuk: Existentialism and Politics*. Basingstoke, England: Springer.
- Cuddon, J. A., & Habib, M. A. (2014). *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London, England: Penguin Books.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1997). *The Second Sex*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Pamuk, Orhan. *The Museum of Innocence*. Trans. Maureen Freely. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. Print
- Göknar, E. (2013). Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy.
doi:10.4324/9780203080108Göknar, E. (2006). Orhan Pamuk and the "Ottoman" Theme.
World Literature Today, 80(6), 34. doi:10.2307/40159242