

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN ORHAN

PAMUK'S "A STRANGENESS IN MY MIND"

Pankaj Kapoor

Assistant Professor, G.C.G., Patiala

Abstract

Orhan Pamuk is a modern writer concerned about the anomalies in social structure in his country. He shows his country in its true colours depicting the society and its weaknesses. He tries to penetrate the web of outdated traditions with his artistic acumen in order to improve upon the given conditions. Though his country has become a Republic but still the dogmatic views hinder the path of progress. He has commented in detail about the condition of females in his society. The females are not given their due share in overall structure of the society. They have to toe the lines of the hardliners in every sphere of life. In *A Strangeness in My Mind* the protagonist comments about the interference of society in a husband wife relationship. His wife has to undergo an ordeal in order to abort the unwanted child and subsequently she pays the price with her life

Key words—Tradition, Modernity, Culture, and Health.

Ferit Orhan Pamuk is a Noble Laureate from Turkey. He has been awarded many prestigious awards including Dublin Literary Award for his novel *My Name is Red*. He has contributed in the field of painting and screen writing also. Apart from writing novels he has composed travelogues also. In his writing whether he places the scene in the contemporary Turkey or ancient past his keen eye penetrates the reality hidden behind the curtain of social barriers. Turkey has been declared a Republic in the early twentieth century by Ataturk Kemal Pasha so that the country can progress like the neighbouring western countries. He exhorted the common man to follow the logical way of life shunning the orthodoxies. Pamuk also takes a step in this direction with the power of his writing. He shows the rich cultural past but he also comments on the redundant traditions and he was in the eye of the storm for his blunt views. He was targeted by the local media and his loyalty towards his motherland was questioned. Erdag Goknar comments on Pamuk's situation:

The media often discusses what Pamuk is perceived to represent as a “Turk” and his authenticity as a writer, which revolves around his relationship to orthodoxies of Turkish secularism and national identity. Extreme commentaries accuse Pamuk, a secular Turk, of being a Jewish convert, or dönme, of being an enemy of Turks or a self-hating Turk, of opposing Kemalism, of being entrepreneurial, apolitical, a comprador, a bourgeoiselitist, a commodifier of literature, of being in the service of foreign lobbies or conspiratorial networks, and of selling out his country for personal gain. (Goknar 16).

Pamuk has to face a court case because of a statement about Armenian genocide in an interview. He said “Thirty thousand Kurds have been killed here, and a million Armenians. And almost nobody dares to mention that. So I do.” (Pamuk, Interview). Pamuk has to leave his motherland because a conspiracy was hatched for his assassination. He was fined by the court but ultimately he was absolved after the international interference in his case. Pamuk uses many postmodern techniques like multiple narrators telling the same story from their point of view. Even inanimate objects are given a voice. He uses flashback and flash-forward also. Many times the characters from his earlier works came in the present work also. And sometimes he drops a hint about the future also. There is a strong presence of autobiographical elements also. Pamuk has discussed the art and artists in detail in his fiction. The East and the West are juxtaposed time and again. The West is seen as a perpetrator of a conspiracy against their religion. The novel *My Name is Red* opens with the voice of a dead person. He says “My death conceals an appalling conspiracy against our religion, our traditions and the way we see the world.” (Pamuk, *My Name is Red* 7). The religious leaders hold the sway on common man’s life in the name of God. Zizek’s comment is pertinent in this situation “Here the basic deception consists in the fact that the Leader’s point of reference, the instance to which he is referring to legitimize his rule (the People, the Class, the Nation), doesn’t exist – or, more precisely, exists only through and in its fetishistic representative, the party and its Leader.” (Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 164).

A Strangeness in My Mind tells the story of Mevlut in bildungsroman manner. He comes from a village to a city in search of green pastures. The place where he belongs to has different attitude towards male and females. When he goes to sell boza in the city then one of the customers asked him “Does your wife wear a headscarf? We are just poor village people from the countryside, said Mevlut. We are attached with our traditions.” (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 25). This shows the hold of orthodoxy in the life of common people. Mevlut has seen his wife Rahiya once in a

party and he fell in love with her. Actually he has seen Rahiya's sister Samiha but he was tricked into marrying Rahiya. When he elopes with her "They found each other in darkness. They held hands without even thinking about it and began to run." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 5). Later on he finds out that the girl he has eloped with is not the girl he has seen in the party but he continues his life with her. The society has different parameters for males and females. Then there is comment on in relation marriages also. The males aspire for a modern wife who can please them in every possible way and their role model is western girls but they cannot admit it publicly. In their private life they can afford to go against the diktats of traditions but they have to maintain a public face. Mevlut's friend Ferhat has a penfriend teenage girl of Europe. He has found her address from a magazine. He says "Hey, which claimed to be Turkey's first youth magazine, published the addresses of European girls' only – never Turkish ones, as this would have offended conservative families." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 86).

The attitude towards sex is also dealt with at length. The boys want to enjoy the girls prior to the marriage but they expect their wives should be virgin. Mevlut watches adult films in his school days. He justifies his action that all the boys in the school watch adult movies stealthily. He says "Sex was a kind of miracle that always kept you waiting." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 93). He wants to have a girlfriend or any woman he can enjoy with but he does not have any of these options so he justifies his masturbation. "Playing with himself at home made him feel guilty but ... he didn't have a girlfriend, or a wife to sleep with." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 97). The trouble with the boys is that they watch western adult movies in the cinema and they want their girlfriends to behave like those western girls but they want wives who are deeply rooted in their old traditions. A girlfriend who can sleep with her boyfriend is aspired by everyone but the same girl is not welcome by the same boyfriend as a wife. She can be a pretty seductress as a girlfriend only. Mevlut dreams about his would be wife and he is dying to be in relation with a girl and he says "A pretty girl with a headscarf and good morals, the kind he would life for a wife, would never sleep with him before they get married; and he would never want to marry a woman willing to havew sex with him before the wedding." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 152). This dialogue sums up the encrusted morality of the society towards females. Mevlut wants to have sex but he is convinced that only a girl who does not wear a headscarf will be ready to have sex prior to marriage.

There are elaborate comments on relation between a male and female prior to marriage. Mevlut knows that he is not supposed to indulge with Rahiya prior to their marriage. Ferhat arranges for a

makeshift priest to arrange the marriage as per sharia law. But that man says that he cannot solemnize the marriage as per sharia law as Mevlut has run away with Rahiya and he has not paid the bride price also. Further Rahiya's family is not involved to observe all the rituals. Mevlut says "Any physical intimacy that might occur without there being a religious union in place is to be considered fornication." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind*217). All these traditions and taboos place a restriction on Mevlut to observe these prior to their marriage and even after marriage. When he is duly married with Rahiya and he wants to enjoy marital bliss with her even then he feels guilty as he and Rahiya observes fast during the month of Ramadan. He says "Anyone who keeps fast, even kids, knows that there should not be any physical contact between husbands and wives during fasting hours." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind*220). He is newly married and he thinks about ways to circumvent the restrictions of fasting. He thinks that an innocent kiss on the hand is not going to violate the fast as he is not planning for full fledge sex or children. Then he remembers that VEDIHA has told him that boys indulge in masturbation during fasting. They defend themselves for this act "The imam states that you mustn't touch your spouse, not that you mustn't touch yourself... Maybe there isn't anything in the holy book that forbids sex during Ramadan either." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 221). Even Rahiya also agrees with Mevlut that the newly wedded couples just wedded prior to the month of Ramadan are allowed to have their pleasure as God does not forbid them to indulge as they are lawfully married as husband and wife as per the religious rituals.

There is wish that they should have a baby boy but Mevlut is blessed with a baby girl. The society has a clear cut preference for a male child as Mevlut has planned the names for a boy and has not thought about a name for a girl. After some years Rahiya gives birth to another girl. She is sad that her husband has not thought about name for her baby girl. There is clear discrimination between males and females as Rahiya observes "A girl's name can't have Allah in it! Said Mevlut. According to Koran, the most that girls could hope for was to be named for one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind*258). Rahiya wants to plan a name for a girl also but Mevlut is not interested at all. VEDIHA the elder sister of Rahiya searches for books for name of girls and boys and she purchases two books. After reading that book Rahiya observes "While the girls' names live in separate pages from the boys', just as men and women lived separately in Ottoman palaces." (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind*245). This is a male dominated society and all the major decisions are made by them.

Vediha says that her husband is interested in her physically only as he does not bother about her emotions or health. But the silver lining is that she was blessed with two sons. Rahiya also feels the pain that Mevlut was happy when they had the physical bliss but after the birth of girls he takes less interest in her. He comes to her when he wants to have sex otherwise he is busy in other things always. Rahiya never demanded any attention for her health issues. Her elder sister Vedihadelivered the babies at home and it was done like this in her village also. Many women died giving birth to babies but it was seen as a will of God. No one ever demanded that the delivery should be done by an expert. Rahiya is expecting a baby again and she was told by Mevlut that this time again it is going to be a girl. She is feeling guilty so she plans for an abortion in a crude manner in the absence of a doctor. “Rahiya had done something primitive, something from the village, to try to cause a miscarriage, but it had gone wrong, and now the blood loss and pain had left her barely conscious.” (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 428). Mevlut takes her to a hospital as she has fallen unconscious. She was not able to cope with the pressure of delivering a girl again. Mevlut says “By the time they went through the hospital door, Rahiya had bled to death. She was thirty years old.” (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 429).

Conclusion

Pamuk’s fiction throws light on the plight of females in his society. The females are given secondary role in all the spheres. They are not treated at par with males. The dictates of orthodoxy governs their life. They are supposed to wear headscarf as it is a symbol of their religious adherence. They are not sent to school like boys. Their health is not the priority for their fathers and not for their husbands after their marriage. They are concerned about the rituals after death as Korkut says “The best place to have her washed is at the bathhouse of the Barbaros Mosque in Besiktas, they have people there who specialize in handling female corpses.” (Pamuk, *A Strangeness in My Mind* 431). Pamuk shows the plight of women to create awareness about their health.

REFERENCES

Bharathan, Sapna. *The political cultural and artistic imagination in OrhanPamuk*.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/308020>. Accessed 23 June 2020.

Goknar, Erdag. “OrhanPamuk Secularism and Blasphemy, The Politics of Turkish Novel”

Comparative Critical Studies 4, pp. 403–432 © BCLA 2007 DOI:
10.3366/E17441854080098, https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Orhan_Pamuk_Secularism_and_Blasphemy.html. Accessed 01 Mar. 2019.

Myers, Tony. *SlovajZizek, Routledge Critical Thinkers*, Routledge. 2007.

Pamuk,Orhan. *My Name is Red*. Translated by Erdag M. Goknar, Faber and Faber, 2001.

---, *A Strangeness in My Mind*.2013. Trans. Ekin Oklap. Penguin Books, 2015.

---, <https://www.orhanpamuk.net/biography.aspx>, Accessed 08-04-2019.

---, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Orhan-Pamuk>, Accessed 22-08-2019.

Zizek, Slovaj. *The Sublime Objects of Ideology*, Verso, 2017.