

**Metaphors of Wounding, Healing and Transformation of Iskender in
Elif Shafak's *Honour***

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Abstract:

Elif Shafak, a Turkish-British author gives voice to the voiceless and in her narrative, she preoccupies herself with the use of different figures of speech to render her themes in the canvas of craftsmanship. This paper takes up Shafak's tragic narrative *Honour* under consideration and explores Iskender's wounding, healing and transformation using the lens of metaphor. All throughout the novel, Shafak employs an intricate network symbolising psychological wounds, social healing and self-healing leading to transformation. Negotiating metaphors through the character of Iskender Toprak, the writer presents healing not as an erasure of sufferings but as the gradual process of confronting reality and reconstructing identity for transformation indeed.

Key Words - Metaphor, wounding, healing, transformation, honour-killing.

Introduction:

Shafak's *Honour* is a tragic narrative wherein a son kills his mother for the sake of honour and this honour-killing is enough to bring tragic ends to the life of each family member involved. Iskender and his mother, Pembe are central to the plot of honour-killing and Iskender here is portrayed more as a complex character than a mere perpetrator of orthodox patriarchy. Iskender is a psychologically wounded character whose life is conditioned by patriarchy, cultural expectations, emotional deprivation and marginalisation. Iskender is a central figure where Shafak interplays her use of metaphors and weaves the journey to transformation for a "heavy wound needs treatment that is strong" (Rumi 220). Iskender is central to the metaphor of wounding, healing and transformation that operates not only at psychological level but also at emotional, cultural and spiritual levels too.

Iskender stands as an example of tragic self-realization after causing the tragedy under the tag of honour-killing. His life is a metaphorical pilgrimage where the inherited cultural and orthodox notions of honour become wounds for him and healing comes from the company of Zeeshan in his imprisonment. The themes as well as the subthemes

repeatedly point to this metaphor as Mieke Bal points out “Metaphors and comparisons can occur on any level. A metaphor can replace the theme or accompany it. The same holds for sub-themes” (30). Taking up the metaphor of wound, it comes up that Shafak's portrayal of Iskender presents him as being wounded with patriarchal masculinity, abandonment, cultural dislocation and humiliation. Reiterating these wounds Iskender never binds to constructive approach but takes up violence and finds validation in patriarchal dominance causing destruction in long run.

As far as the wound of patriarchal masculinity is considered, Shafak through the initial episodes of the narrative exposes that Iskender is burdened with the expectations of masculinity. Having been abandoned by his father and being the eldest son of his family it falls upon him to protect the honour of the family and female virtue. As a result, his identity is constructed not under natural norms but under patriarchal norms. This wounds Iskender deeply for he lacks emotional freedom causing frustration and anger.

Iskender and his family were abandoned by his father Adem and this abandonment causes emotional displacement that Iskender tries to fill prematurely. In his adolescence he tries to prove his manhood under the burden of abandonment injuring him enough to lead him to an exaggerated masculine authority. Iskender's family migrated from Turkey to London causing an imbalance of belongingness and at the same time adding to his psychologically wounded state. Failure to reconcile Eastern and Western traditions adds to the displacement and wounds as well. Looking critically into the wounds of Iskender it becomes evident that the crime of honour-killing emerges not from inherent evil but from accumulated wounds and trauma that go unnoticed or untreated.

Out of all the wounds discussed above the wound of the inherent concept of honour is central to the narrative under consideration. Through Iskender, Shafak exposes the destructive dimension of the virtue of honour, for rather than becoming a source of moral guidance it becomes a source of anxiety, fear and violence leading him to value social approval over human compassion. This inability to value morality over cultural expectations, leads to the culmination of the metaphor of wound through honour-killing of Jamila (mistaken as Pembe).

When it comes to the metaphor of healing, the paradox comes to play when the freedom and reflection both are found in confinement. Prison becomes a site of healing for here Iskender gets the time and freedom of retrospection. Time and the company of Zeeshan forces him to visit back and question unquestioned orthodox beliefs. As per the theory of trauma, healing requires confrontation rather than repression. Adding to the metaphor of healing the letters Iskender writes from Prison contribute substantially. While Esma heals with storytelling, Iskender heals with letter writing. Bridging the sin and redemption, Iskender finds himself more when he confronts his past in his letters.

Iskender finds himself transformed only after being in the company of Zeeshan, a Sufi character of the narrative under consideration. Zeeshan arrives as a spiritual guide and light in Iskender's life and connects him to his real self, allowing for his self-realization before God-realization. Unlike all other male figures who hammered him with the orthodoxy, Zeeshan hammered Iskender with his spiritual identity. He conditioned him to seek inner reality and peace rather than external orthodox notions of honour and masculinity. Zeeshan serves as a metaphor of Iskender's true healing leading to his transformation.

The metaphor of transformation comes to play with Iskender's guilt and penitence. Guilt within Iskender functions in a productive way for he acquires a moral outlook over deeds and understands that the honour of the family being compromised does not need justification through violence and honour-killing as is evident in the letter he writes to his mother from the prison:

Dear Mother,

I'm not going to send this letter. I'll bring it myself, inshallah, and give it to you, because it's easier to write the contents than to say them. This year I had my eyes opened. I had this daft cellmate. Daft in a good way. You would have liked him. His name was Zeeshan. Good bloke, helped me a lot. I understand this better now that he's gone. Too bad, we always appreciate what we have after we lose it. If I could be sixteen years old again, I'd never do the things that I did to cause so much pain. To you, my sister, my brother, my poor aunt. I cannot change the past. Not a single moment of it. Zeeshan says I can improve myself now. Even of that I'm not sure. But if you'd accept me into your life again, if you could find it in your heart to forgive me, what a blessing it'd be to once more be your son. (*Honour* 323)

His transformation resembles his rebirth for the arrogant, angry and rude Iskender has transformed to a penitent, reflective and remorseful adult. His willingness to apologise to his mother proves his ethical transformation and the letters he writes from his prison show his evolving shades of transformation. Thus, the emotional evolution of Iskender demonstrates the possibility of redemption even after irreversible violence. He has transformed not only emotionally but also spiritually. Iskender's dormant spiritual self has been awakened by Zeeshan leading to his being a better version of himself. As Rumi puts it up:

Though many infidels desired religion
They were still trapped by pride and reputation—
This chain's much harder than those men have made;
Those chains are broken by an axe's blade
And they can be released quite easily,
While from this hidden chain no man gets free.
If men fall victim to a wasp's sting, then

Their natural defence heals them again,
But since this sting is from your being, friend,
The pain's much more intense and it won't end! (199)

To sum it up, Shafak in her spell-bounding output *Honour* employs the metaphors of wounds, healing and transformation. The tragic journey of Iskender testifies that violence emerges not from innate evil but from inherited psychological and cultural wounds. Honour-killing which aimed at defending family dignity ended up destroying Toprak family and Iskender's moral integrity. Healing for Iskender was not a piece of cake for as Caruth Cathy writes "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor" (4). In fact, it involved all complications and conflicts. Inherited definitions of masculinity conflict with personal freedom and responsibility. Transformation is neither complete nor simple but a continuous confrontation with trauma and remorse. Iskender's evolution testifies to the fact that healing is not the task of self for self but it is one which involves personal and social levels simultaneously. Healing has to deal with accountability, truth and human connection as Shafak states, "so how do you transform something from within but remain detached from it at the same time" (*Honour* 65). To put in a nutshell, Shafak's *Honour* does not merely deal with honour-killing but it serves as an instance of moral rebirth where it makes room even after being afflicted by psychological, social and cultural wounds to heal and transform.

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