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Postmodern Female Consciousness in Paulo Coelho's The Zahir

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By

Manju Panta

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Manju Panta
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Abstract

This thesis explores the power of female character in *The Zahir* (2004). It looks at Zahir as a courageous and bold woman who reverses the prevailing male conception of male superiority and shows the universal dependence of male upon female. Zahir creates a kind of thunder in the narrator's mind. The unnamed narrator, husband to Zahir remains submissive to his wife and accepts what she says. In her absence, he makes a quest for his own identity, but does not get it without Zahir. She is able to show the power of being a female individual. She stands as a role model of female empowerment. It is a redefinition of women's role and it dismantles the male's power. *The Zahir* reflects the violation of a lady, for her subjectivity, consciousness and for her choice.

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Chapter I

Postmodernity, Self and Society

It is often noted that defining postmodernism is an exceedingly difficult task, if not an impossible one. Postmodernism exhibits a number of key features that are generally accepted under this term. Postmodernism, like post structuralism and deconstruction, is a critique of the aesthetic of the preceding age, but besides mere critique, postmodernism celebrates the very act of dismembering tradition. Postmodernism questions everything.

Postmodern approaches to gender, sex and sexuality to varying degrees adopt a radical skepticism with regard to the natural and the real, and promote a programmed of denaturalizing in which the idea of biological essence is dissolved and replaced with social construction. Postmodern principle is not that sexuality is something natural, nor is it something completely determinate and definable. Rather it is constructed. The relationship between sexuality and gender inequality has provoked wide discussion and controversy within Feminism, too. Sexuality is variously affected by various factors such as patriarchy, unequal position in the labor market and their domestic roles within the family, men's attempt to control women by means of women's oppression and violence deep-rooted in patriarchy is sex/gender hierarchy. Kate Millett has clarified that sex is politically motivated because male-female relationship is determined by it.

The term postmodern remains a confused and vacuous term. In this era, the life style of the postmodern people has changed. We pay our money and are entertained by consuming second hand experiences which once formed the basis of everyday life. To a significant extent, we have become tourists in our own culture. Sunday no longer means a

trip to church or chapel but rather a visit to cathedral of consumerism. Perhaps, one of the most noticeable areas of growth in consumer markets has been in men's fashion and life style accessories. With the changing of the societies, the narrative about society too changing. The tendency of narrative in postmodern art and literature is quite different from modern narrative. It is said that:

Since world war two, People no longer believe in these two grand meta-narratives. After all applying science reason to the construction of gas chamber and efficient railroad scheduled the Nazis exterminated millions of human beings. Did these people experience freedom and liberation? And did science fulfill Hegel's narrative of increasing knowledge. (Powell 30)

Postmodernism, then, is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narrative serve to make the contradiction and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice. In other word, every attempt to create 'order' always demands the creation of equal amount of disorder but a grand- narrative Jean Francois Lyotard argues that stability and order is maintained through grand narratives or master narrative. Similarly, Jean Baudrillard describes the simulacra of postmodern life which have taken place of real objects.

Postmodern novels can be distinguished in its narratives strategies from the modernist's novels. Postmodernism, as we take post-history refers not to specific historical development, but to the process of history and the understanding of temporality

itself is suspicious of continuity or history. The ending or existence of postmodern narratives has multiple meanings. The novel ends with multiple interpretations unlike close ending of traditional novels are avant-garde, experimental in their form.

Paulo Coelho was born in August 1947 in Brazil. The journey of his writing started with *The Pilgrimage* in 1987. He wrote other luminous novels about the different streams of our lives including, *The Zahir*, *The Alchemist*, *The Valley*, *The Veronica Decides to die*, *The fifth Mountain*, *The Devil and Miss Prism*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Manual of Warrior* these novels becomes able to lead the zenith of glory and he is one of the renowned writer of the world. Paulo Coelho wrote *The Zahir* in January and June 2004 while he was in his own pilgrimage to Paris. In this text, the writer shows the journey of the protagonist to discover his wife, disappeared ago. In the absence of Esther, his wife proves worse than he has ever thought before and similarly in the absence of Esther, his life is futile and meaningless.

This research tells about the implementation of postmodern female consciousness in *The Zahir*. Feminism is often taken as the most important radical forces of postmodernism. Like postmodernism, it deals with the issues of marginalized women. How the female character bears the postmodern female consciousness in the novel is the course of this research. *The Zahir* by Paulo Coelho is highly appreciated book among the readers. It deals about the issues of love, trust, marital relationship and freedom. By depiction of Esther, a female protagonist who represents postmodern women of the 20th century; the novel is really able to throw light upon female capability. Esther leaves the

narrator when she finds her identity is in crisis and accepts him only when the narrator realizes the value of her surrender.

The term postmodern feminism is believed to have begun and widely used in the 1980s. Postmodern feminism is used to refer to the many different theories within the feminism movement. Generally, people that use this term are individuals agree that may be against feminism overall, as they feel it does not relate to today's society. These individuals agree that feminism was positive, as it was first established to help women receive the rights they deserved. In today's society, it is viewed by some that women's right are as they should be and feminism is no longer needed, hence we are now in the postmodern feminism age. The overall view by these individuals basically generalize that problem in society today effects everyone as a whole, not just women. The term is viewed as a new era from women and the thought they are completely equal in today's society, moving on from the old view of traditional feminism. This generally consists of white males, as they feel most effected by feminism as a whole as a direct impact to their individuals rights in our society. This differs from anti-feminist views as feminism is still viewed positively toward women and its historic value for shaping the structure of gender equality today. This view does not necessarily condone the slide back to a patriarchal dominated society again, but that the staunch feminist may actually contribute to the negative views of women by over-stepping their bounds from their stances with general societal issues.

The story revolves around the narrator, a best selling novelist's search for his missing wife Esther. The narrator is suspected of having a role to play in the inexplicable disappearance of his wife from their home in Paris. The entire novel can be seen through the eyes of this narrator, who remained nameless in the story, as he narrates how he becomes consumed by the thought of finding his war correspondent wife, Esther. She becomes his Zahir, obsession, someone whose presence can not go unnoticed. The narrator is famous author, with all the wealth and fortune could find another lover just as easily. Yet, He remains haunted by all the unanswered questions and the possibilities he could never explore without his wife beside him.

In Paulo Coelho's novel *The Zahir*, the narrator tells the story of his search of himself. When his wife, Esther disappears for eight years, he is seemingly oblivious as to the reason why she left him; in his opinion, they had a perfect marriage. Though he considers himself to be a reflective person, and although his authorship seems to suggest same, he realizes that he has not understood himself or Esther for many years. As he sets out to find Esther, following the advice of her friend Mikhail, he is really going in search of himself too. The meaning in *The Zahir* besides feminism can be expanded and deepened by looking at it through an existential analysis using the themes of anxiety, immediately freedom, death and story-telling. Although Coelho's conclusions that love is an overarching force that gives meaning to everything is arguably not found in Kierkegaard, Heidegger, or Sartre. Through the narrator's journey from Paris to Kazakstan, Coelho explores various meaning of love and life.

Postmodern feminism looks at the issues from the principle that women too are human beings and they have equal position in gender. This is shown in Paulo Coelho's *The Zahir*. Esther as a postmodern woman, fighting for the equal gender position in the society. Zahir breaks the gender biasedness and step ahead not only as an inferiorized woman but being a human. Zahir goes to become war correspondent fighting the gender biased thought of her husband. Thus, *The Zahir* can be analyzed from the postmodern feminist perspective, which is shown details in textual analysis chapter.

The novel is important in many ways. Different critics have analyzed it from multiple perspectives. Margaret Jull Coste comments about the novel as:

The narrator of *The Zahir* is a best selling novelist who lives in Paris and enjoys all the privileges, money and celebrity brings. His wife of ten years, Esther, is a war correspondent who has disappeared along with a friend Mikhail who may or may not be his lover. (1)

Similarly, Wisam Mansour views this perspective of gender issues like Barthes' Shahrayas, Coelho's man undergoes a radical change that meditates centuries of prescribed conventional masculinity and ends by not only condemning female fidelity, but also legitimizing it by his reunion with his wife in spite the fact that she is pregnant by some other man (94).

Similarly, another critic Joseph Blair states that in Parody in *The Zahir* fluctuating mind:

Life of the narrator in *The Zahir* is the life of every postmodern person whereas she/he is in the world. Nothing can be taken for granted since everything moves ahead in crooked way that one is not convinced about. The previous philosophy once proven impractical, changes it and follows one that can help to forget the harmful and unpleasant moments. The similar situation is one of the unnamed narrators in *The Zahir*. (82)

The narrator sees gradual change in his life and thinks that the genuine cause behind all these radical changes is because of Zahir's love for him. He is in the process of changing as well. After all, the narrator is also a postmodern hero who takes everything as right and gets committed to doing for the sake of temporal happiness and contentment. Now, onwards all his efforts are for the protection of his self that lies in the presence and company of Esther.

In the same way, Department of Philosophy and religion comments upon Esther as:

She becomes a war correspondent to find what the meaning of life really is. She finds that in a war zone people live authentically, yet without reflection, which prompts her attempt to discover what the opposite would be on authentic life a self discovery. (3)

The novel has been analyzed from multiple perspectives. The issue of the implementation of postmodern female consciousness is the most innovative one. It will be fruitful to discuss the tentative plan of this research. The introductory chapter will give the bird's eye view of the work. The second chapter makes an extensive discussion of the theoretical idea of feminism. Similarly, the next chapter makes a textual analysis on the theoretical premises developed in the second chapter. The concluding chapter contains the details and themes of this research.

Chapter II

Postmodern Feminity and Patriarchy

The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural, or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political, cultural and sociological theories as well as philosophical concerned with issues of gender difference. It is also a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's right and interest.

According to Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker, the history of feminism can be divided into three waves (4). The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's, the second was in the 1970s and the third extends from the 1990s to present. Feminist theory emerged from these movements. It is manifest in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history and feminist literary criticism.

First wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and United States. Originally, it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property right for women and the opposition to the chattel marriage and ownership of married women by their husbands. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly right of women's suffrage. Yet, feminists such as Voltairine de Cleyre and Margaret Sanger were still active in campaigning for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic right at this time.

Second wave feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. Second -wave feminism has continued to exist since that time and coexist with what is termed third wave feminism. The scholar Estelle Freedman compares first- and second- wave feminism saying that first wave focused on rights, such as suffrage. Whereas second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination.

Third wave feminism began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to perceive failure of the second wave and also as a response to the backlash against initiatives and moments created by the second wave. Third wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central too much of the third wave's ideology. Third-wave feminists often focus on micro- politics and challenge the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not good for women.

Postmodern feminism is a particular kind of postmodernism and particular kind of feminist theory that has become prominent in feminist thinking over the last couple of decades. Postmodern feminist have built on the ideas of Foucault, de Beauvoir as well as Derrida and Lacan. Postmodern feminists accept the male/female binary as a main categorizing force in our society. They criticize the structure of society and the dominant order especially in its patriarchal aspects. Postmodern feminists is the ultimate acceptor of diversity, multiple truths, multiple roles, multiple realities are part of its focus. There is a rejectance of an essential nature of women of one way to be women. Post structural

feminists offer a useful philosophy for diversity in feminism because of its acceptance of multiple truths and rejection of essentialism.

Three writers have been instrumental in the establishment of postmodern feminism as a philosophy, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Helen Cixous is a writer of prose who built on Derrida's work to criticize the very nature of writing. According to Cixous, man's writing is filled with binary opposition but a woman's writing is scubbling, rotting down, interrupted by life's demands. She also relates feminist writing to female sexuality and women's body concepts. Her idea is that development of this kind of writing will change the rules that govern language and ultimately the thinking process and the structure of society.

Luce Irigaray is a psychoanalyst whose primary focus is to liberate women from men's philosophies, including Derrida and Lacan, on which she is building. Irigaray takes on Freudian and Lacanian conception of child development, and is one of the thousands who criticize the Oedipal complex. However since western culture is not going to abandon Freud, Irigaray has two strategy for women to experience herself as something other than waste or excess in the little structured margins of dominant ideology: 1. create a gender neutral language, 2. engage in lesbian and autoerotic practice, for by virtue of exploring the multifaceted terrain of the female body, women will learn to speak words and think thoughts that will blow the phallus over. If women exist only in men's eyes, as images, women should take those images and reflect them back to men in magnified proportions (228).

Julia Kristeva rejects the idea that the biological men and women are identified with the masculine and feminine respectively. To insist that people are different because of their anatomy is to force both men and women into a repressive structure. Kristeva openly accepts the label of feminist but refuses to say there is a women's perspective.

The belief that one is a woman is almost as absurd and obscurantist as the belief that one is a man. Kristeva further says "There are still many goals which women can achieve: freedom of abortion and contraception, daycare centers for children, equality on the job etc" (228). Kristeva questions of femininity and prefers to see it as position. She opines that feminist language is semiotic and pre-oedipal. Semiotic means the stage where the mother and baby fused together inside the womb of the mother.

Kristeva sees the problem of women as other similar to the problem of other groups excluded from the dominant Jews, homosexual, racial and ethnic minorities. Like other postmodern feminist, she views the use of language as crucial. In her view, linear, logical, normal writing was repressed and writing that emphasized rhythm and sound and syntactically illogical was unrepressed.

Julia Kristeva from *The Identity to Another* (1975) and Helen Cixous's *The Laugh of Medusa* (1980) are two prominent essays on psychoanalytic and deconstructive feminism, and both of them emphasize on "women's discourse with female morphology speaking specific experiences" (7). For Kristeva, female discourse that breaks with tradition is political act of dissidence, a form of feminist action or for Cixous, women's writing has a genuinely revolutionary force.

Much write deal with discrimination regarding gender and sex in the society. The distinction between biological sex and social gender is clearly present in Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in which she has a famous assertion that one is not born women; one becomes, one encapsulated an argument that women's inferior position is not a natural or biological fact but one that is created by society (14).

Andriene Rich, a radical feminist, presents her claim that the male protectiveness is dangerous for female. She is strongly opposite to the example. Rich's account of patriarchy explicitly obstructs the position of women in any social context:

Under patriarchy I may live in Purdan or drive a truck; I may raise my children in Kibbutz, or be the sole bread-winner for a fatherless family. I may serve my husband his early wall of Barber village on March in an academic procession; whatever my status or situation, my derived economic class or my sexual preference, I live under the power of fathers, and have access only to so privilege or influence as the patriarchy is willing to academe, and only for so long as I will pay the prices for male approval. (58)

Thus, Rich is very much critical of the male domination in the name of protection. She inspired many novelists and story writers after her who advocated for the freedom for women without male protection.

In the final chapter of Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, he cautions against using the category of sex as a fictitious unity, casual principle and argues that the fictitious category of sex facilitates a reversal of casual relations such that sex is understood to cause the structure and meaning of desire:

The notion of sex made it possible to group together; in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensation to make use of this fictitious unity as a casual principle, an omnipresent meaning. Sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier as a universal signified. (16)

For Foucault, the body is not sexed in any significant sense prior to its determination within a discourse through which it becomes invested with an idea of natural or essential sex. The body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations. Sexuality is a historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies and affectivity. As such, sexuality is understood by Foucault to produce sex as an artificial concept which effectively extends and disguise the power relation responsible for its genesis.

French feminist tried to deconstruct language, philosophies, social practices and culture and culture that are patriarchal in tendency. It is also an attempt of decolonizing, from the gender-based ideology. Deconstructing the male centered thinking, they claim that not only the culture and religion that support the male domination, but also the language that can overcome the patriarchal dominance. Binary oppositions are rooted in

patriarchal society and females are marginalized as natives or slaves are done in colonialism. Gayatri spivak puts her opinion saying:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the women disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shutting which is the displaced figuration of the third-world women caught between tradition and modernization. (306)

Hence, the self of women is displaced under patriarchal norms. To get rid of this situation they search for an epistemological revolution with anthropological consequences. With the advent of philosophies, women got extra vigor because they got a tool to oppose the concept of binary oppositions that had marginalized the females.

In the same way, American writer Edna G.Rostow purposes duality in women as feminism as femininity. As she writes:

Achieving self realization based on self –knowledge within a family and social group is revealed as a harder job. The distinguished profession women who must write intimately for her marriage, the educator who must mention her children in every speech, is expressing her gratitude that she is a women, as well as successful achieves in the world of men. (396)

Her intention is to combine feminism and femininity in order to continue the society and feminist movement in a fruitful way. She strongly opposes the concept of women love

men and men love their work and emphasizes on the mutual understanding and sharing within them. Women should have glory on her dignity and works as men have.

The women have both images of being fascinating and destructive in patriarchal society. They are stereotyped as either good or bad women. If a women accepts her traditional gender role of being gentle, submissive, passive, emotional, virginal, angelic and obeys the patriarchal rules. We can see the image of good girl and bad girl in the following words of Lois Tyson:

According to the patriarchal ideology, bad girl violate patriarchal norms in the same way; they are sexually foreword in appearance or behavior, or they have multiple sexual partners. The good is rewarded for her good behavior by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture. She is attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: She is modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing and nurturing. She has no needs of her own; she is completely satisfied by serving her family. (89)

The good girl obeys the patriarchal norms whereas the bad girls violate them. The good girl has to remain uninterested in sexual activity except for the purposes of legitimate procreation, because it is believed in patriarchy as unnatural for women to have sexual desire. The good women are expected to find sex frightening or disgusting. She does not want her own self-autonomy in the society. She only knows about traditional rules. But

the bad women who are power seeking always want newness in the society. They do not limit themselves with the boundary, which is drawn by the patriarchy. They have strong feminist idea that they can do what male can. Therefore, they want their self-autonomy.

In the male centered ideology, discourse and social reality, the women are supposed as body and men are esteemed as soul. In Platonic term 'soul' transcends everything whereas body is immanent, temporary and sensual, hence is valueless, so, Elizabeth V. Spelman repeats:

What philosophers have had to say about women typically has been nasty, brutish and short. Because philosophers have not said much about women, and when they have, it has usually been in short essays or chatty addended a which have not been considered to be part of the central body of their work, it is tempting to regard their expressed views about women as systematic: their remark on women are unofficial asides which are unrelated to the heart of philosophical doctrines. (367)

Women have been excluded from the public arenas. The philosophers have marginalized women from their philosophical discourse, for they have not said much about women. Instead of saying something for the women, they sketched women in a derogatory way.

In the same way, Gilbert and Gubar also advocate for female emancipation denying the patriarchal standards. They undercut Blooms *Notions of Anxiety of Influence*

with regard female authors. According to them, there is anxiety of authorship in the literary tradition. In *The Madwomen in the Attic*, they created such type of women who dared to cross the barriers by patriarchal society.

Likewise Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) was the first widely read work of feminist literary criticism. Millett's focus was upon the twin poles of gender as biology and culture. In her analysis of D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller and Jean Genet. She reads literatures as a record of male dominance. As a resisting reader, Millett included critiques of capitalism, male power, crude, sexuality and violence against women by associating them with deviance. She aptly concluded that the interior colonization of women by men is studies than any forms of segregation, such as class more uniform and certainly more enduring. (25)

Patriarchal theory is not always as single-sided as the belief that all men always benefit from the oppression of all women. Patriarchal theory maintains that the primary element of patriarchy is a relationship of dominance, where one party is dominant and exploits the other party for the benefit of forms. Feminists also believe that men use social system and other methods of control to keep non-dominant men and women suppressed. The feminist who wrote, spoke about female, directed their writings to end all prejudice, discrimination between male and female. Their main trust was to establish women as human beings. They focused in female emancipation from all forms. With the pace of time several sub movements of feminist ideology have developed over the years. They are:

Liberal Feminism asserts the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. It is an individualistic form of feminism, which focuses on women's ability to show and maintain their equality through their own action and choices. Liberal Feminist uses the personal interactions between men and women as the place from which to transform society. According to Liberal Feminists, all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore, it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society. Issues important to Liberal Feminism include reproductive and abortion rights, sexual harassment, voting, education, equal pay for equal work, affordable childcare, affordable healthcare, and bringing to light the frequency of sexual and domestic violence against women.

Postcolonial Feminism argues that oppression relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class and ethnic oppression, has marginalized women in postcolonial societies. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. Postcolonial feminists object to portrayals of women of non-western societies as passive and voiceless victims and the portrayals of western women as modern, educated and empowered (81).

Postcolonial feminism emerged from the gendered history of colonialism: colonial Powers of often-imposed western norms on colonized regions. In the 1940s and 1950s, after the formation of United Nations, the West for what was considered social progress monitored former colonies. The status of women in the developing world has been monitored by organizations such as the United Nations and as a result traditional

practice and roles taken up by women sometimes seen as distasteful by western standards-could be considered a form of rebellion against colonial oppression (82). Postcolonial feminist today struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by the western colonizers (83).

Radical Feminism is a current within feminism that focus on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on assumption of male supremacy used to oppress women. Radical feminism aims to challenge and to overthrow patriarchy by opposing standards gender roles and what they see as male oppression of women, and calls for radical reordering of society. Early Radical Feminism ,arising within second – wave feminism in the 1960s,typically viewed patriarchy as Trans historical phenomena prior to or deeper than other sources of oppression, not only the oldest and most universal form of domination but the primary form and the models for all others. Radical Feminists locate the root cause of women’s oppression in patriarchal gender relations, as opposed to legal system or class conflict

Radical Feminist in Western society believes that their society is a patriarchy that primarily oppresses women. Radical feminist seek to abolish this patriarchy. They also believe that the way to deal with patriarchy and oppression of all kinds is to attack the underlying causes of this problem and address the fundamental components of society that support them. Due to this, some female radicals feminist refer to themselves as “womyn” in order to dissolve any ties to men or males. While early radical feminist posited that the root cause of all other inequalities is the oppression of women, some

radical feminists acknowledge the simultaneous and interesting effect of other independent categories of oppression as well. These other categories of oppression may include, but are not limited to, oppression based on gender identity, race, social class, perceived attractiveness, sexual orientation and ability.

French feminism refers to a branch of feminist thought from a group of feminist in France from the 1970s to 1990s. French Feminism, compared to Anglophone feminism, is distinguished an approach which is more philosophical and literary. Its writing tends to be effusive and metaphorical, being less concerned with political doctrines and generally focused on theories of the body. The term includes writers who are not French, but who have worked substantially in France and the French tradition such as Julia Kristeva and Bracha Ettinger.

In the 1970s, French feminist approached feminism with the concept of *écriture féminine*, which translate as female or feminine writing? Helen Cixous argues that writing and philosophy are phallogentric and along with other French Feminist such as Luce Irigaray emphasizes writing from the body as a subversive exercise. The work of the feminist psychoanalysis and philosopher, Julia Kriesteva, has influenced feminist theory in general and feminist literary criticism in particular. From the 1980s onwards the work of artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger has influenced literary criticism, art history and film theory.

Feminist theory is an extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. It encompasses work in a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, economics, women's studies, literary criticism, art history, psychoanalysis and philosophy. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focus on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations much of feminist theory focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, oppression and patriarchy.

French Feminism is the result of culmination among post-modernism structuralism, psychoanalysis and Marxist theory. Moreover, it is influenced by Lacan's psychoanalysis. In this respect, Seldom Writes, "French feminist by following Lacan's theories have overcome the hostility towards French shared by most feminist" (145). According to lacan, father signifies what Lacan calls the "law" and entering into father the child will fall in post-structuralist anxiety. The women are a signifier and not a biological female. Lacan says that women can't identify with phallus and thus can't enter into male symbolic order of language. Hence, the French Feminist emphasize on the need of female language.

Postmodern feminism might have began somewhere in the early 1980s with the coinage of the term post-feminism which in fact looks critically at the various feminist theories of the past especially from the second wave of feminism. It also coincides with the third-wave feminism, which began in the early 1990s. Postmodern feminist thought

challenges and avoids the essentialist definitions of femininity that was propagated during the period of modern feminism worked with the existentialist view on women, which establishes the argument that one is not born and thus here the focus is on the social and cultural construction of women by the system.

On the other hand postmodern feminism tries to break away from this thinking which overemphasized the experience of upper middle-class white women in America. According to the thinking that originates in postmodern feminism women is debatable category, complicated by class, ethnicity, sexuality and other facets of identity and therefore gender is performative based on our natural heterosexuality rather than socially or culturally constructed. This argument leads to the conclusion that there is no single cause for women's subordination and no single approach towards dealing with the issue.

Based on above principle postmodern feminist thought address broad range of issues related to gender based bias and discriminations. It tackles global issues such as rape, incest and prostitution and culturally specific issues like female genital mutation in some parts of Africa to infanticide leading to murder of the girl child before birth in some parts of Asia and glass ceiling practices that impede women's advancement in developed countries. Postmodern feminism has in fact tried to understand that how in gender inequality interacts with other issues like racism, homophobia, classism and colonization to produce and establish a matrix of domination by the patriarchal society.

Postmodern feminism cannot be considered as some sort of monolithic entity, which is purely based on generalizations. Postmodern feminist thought is highly individual oriented and it relates to specific issues of women in a particular culture and society. Today women might broadly agree to the goals of feminism that is gender equality and end of gender discrimination but they might not identify themselves as traditional feminists.

Postmodern feminism is therefore experience oriented and women participated in the movement purely based on their practices personal experience in life and that is one of the reasons why the core identity of feminism has to be highly classic. Postmodern feminist thought represents an incredible diversity of individual's lives. Often a woman who otherwise won't align herself with feminism will seek it out when she is confronted with an abusive relationship.

Further women who identify themselves with postmodern feminism are not tied up or concerned with just one issues. They might align themselves with the self-determination and human rights implicit in feminism, but they also organize their life around race, religion or class, rather than solely around gender. They might also be involved with other social justice movements, environmental movements, peace movements, human rights movements like the hip-hop.

Postmodern feminism should look at issues from the principle that women are people and in this context it should propagate views that unite the sexes with equality of

gender and liberation of the individual rather than accept views that separate the sexes. Postmodern feminist thought should move away from being labeled as misandrist in disposition. In fact, gender feminism, which is one of the main tenants of postmodern feminism, should help it work for gender equality through equity feminism, which is an ideology that aims for full civil, and equality among genders. It is far better where women are always portrayed as victims needing preferential treatment.

Postmodern feminism has resulted in some of the most groundbreaking research in the last twenty years. Its major technique discourses analysis has been used in many different fields to ask many different questions. A logical progression of postmodern theory, it has revitalized feminism by questioning many assumptions that were previously unexamined. While as of yet it has not been a major presence in the field of library and information studies, the number of studies utilizing it steadily increasing.

Chapter III

Pain of Betraying: A Feminist Reading of The Zahir`

The Zahir is a novel of obsession, self-exploration and a novel of female awakening. It is all about the unnamed narrator's wife Esther, a vision or eyesight. In the very first chapter, the narrator is shown as a very drunkard, a very hedonist type of characters. He wants to separate Esther away from his life and indulge in the sexual intercourse with women whoever comes in his life. However, when his wife disappears from his life, he feels her existential absence and searching her. In the absence of Esther, his life proves worse than he has ever thought before.

The narrator of the novel is a writer by profession. He is a celebrated narrator artist, whose name significantly remains disguised. Esther, a war correspondent, is the third wife of the narrator. They have been together for eight years. In spite of her love and support to the narrator artist Esther disappear and leaves the narrator confounded and confused. The whole story revolves around the Esther, the causes of her disappearances and losing. Her remembrances haunt the narrator's life. He cannot live without Esther. Therefore, the novel *The Zahir* is about looking for his beloved wife and looking for his own self-identity and an empowered woman too. For the narrator of *The Zahir*, anxiety is brought on by Esther's disappearance. The first realization he has as a result of Esther's disappearance is that he was so dependent upon Esther in his life that the world for him was only a reflection of Esther's beauty. Esther's presence formed his world, which he did not realize until she was gone.

For the narrator women are wonderful instrument for enjoyment. To him fidelity is not important. Rather he loves seduction. In fact, he sees adventure in seducing women and changing life partner not for the perspective of having a formal and social life but for getting new and different taste and experiences of sex. So he says:

It was the first and last time that her friend and I slept together. It wasn't an affair; it came about simply because we had nothing else to do. It had been a bit of dull day, neither of us had any pressing engagements after lunch, and the game of seduction always add a little zest of life, which is why we ended up in bed together. (7)

The narrator believes that having sexual relationship with women is not an affair; rather it takes as a way to pass time. Moreover, he takes sex as a game of seduction. He believes that sex is the source of pleasure since it adds spice to man. He sleeps and encounters with different women. The narrator says, "Women are always looking for stability and fidelity, while I am looking for adventure and the unknown." It reveals his inner feelings and moveable sense of taste in his life.

The narrator is seeking freedom for a long time but when he gets it, it wretches him. He feels alone in the midst of crowd. The long experience of being alone and the life he has ever lived brings him into light and gets aware of the things he did not take notice before. He imagines:

For a few moments , I imagine that Esther is about to come in through that door, walk across the beautiful Persian carpets, sit down beside me and says nothing, just smoke a cigarette, look out at the courtyard garden and holds my hand. Half an hour I believe in the story I have just created, until I realized that it is pure fantasy. (17)

The narrator fantasizes about Esther that she would come and holds his hand as earlier she did. But the reality is different, she disappears. She never comes in his life. She is only in his fantasy, dream, no more in reality.

Zahir on the other hand, is the hero of the novel, who abandon her husband without any worry and hesitation and accepts destiny what she creates or constructs. Zahir is one of the strongest women of the postmodern era, who feel glad for being women and states ahead:

I am glad. I am very content with my female condition. All you expect of women is that we can cook well. Men on the other hand are expected to be able to keep a home afloat, make love, take care of children, bring in the money and be successful. (20)

She is satisfied with her femaleness and feels proud of it too. She deconstructs the patriarchy and does whatever she likes. She goes against her husband to become war correspondent. She ruptures the traditional way of life of women. She is not ready to

remains as housewife. Zahir is aware of the male domination towards women. Thus, revolts for her job, finally she catches it.

She deconstructs male domination and start to keep boyfriend as her husband does. She starts her extramarital relations and starts to going out several nights without telling her husband. She hasn't any problem for it. Her husband thought about it as "I thought she must be having an affair, I agonized for a whole week and asked myself: should I tell her any doubts or just pretend that nothing is happening? I decided to ignore it" (47).

She is the real tutor of the narrator's life, who teaches him a lot. She never comments about his extramarital relations but proves that it is immoral in married life, showing her own relations to the narrator. Zahir knows everything of the narrator's life, his problem, his pretensions etc. She further says at once "your problem is not me, but you, so it would be best if you spent some time alone" (23). The narrator accepts that Zahir is telling the truth. For Zahir, extramarital relation is not a biggest matter. Zahir goes ahead with "I love my man and he loves me" (37). For Zahir, love is more important than anything else is in the world.

In the absence of Zahir, the narrator wanders here and there. The extreme imagination of Esther creates him as an insane fellow. The narrator feels extreme isolation and loneliness without Zahir and wanders as if she is around him. Then he says:

But *The Zahir*, about which I initially used to think with either irritation or affection, continued to grow in my soul. I started looking for Esther in every woman I met. I would see her in every bar, every cinema, at bus stops. More than once I ordered a taxi driver to stop in the middle of the street or to follow someone; until I could persuade myself that the person was not that I was looking for. (54)

The irritation or affection towards Zahir grows in his heart. In addition, this extreme love towards Zahir creates insanity in his mind. Therefore, for him every woman seems as Zahir. The narrator wanders bars, cinema, and bus stop to look her. The narrator thinks Zahir is in every woman he meets.

The narrator confesses the mistakes he committed in his conjugal life immediately after the departure from Zahir. The narrator believes that Zahir would have not left him if he had respected her love. Zahir is the women who forces him to realize and accepts actual love, trust, acceptance and the meaning of marital life. Zahir is almost invisible throughout the text but her influences is seen everywhere. Zahir is the true psyche of the narrator. So, he says:

She fills everything. She is the only reason I am alive. I look around. I prepare myself for the talk. I am to give and understand why I braved the snow, the traffic jams and the ice on the roads: in order to be reminded that every day I need to rebuilt myself and to accepts for the time in my

entire existence that I love another human being more than I love myself.

(60)

Before departure with Zahir, the narrator thinks love, marriage, trust is nothing than a trivialities. For the narrator, sex, women, alcohol are important than any relation. But after departure, he is getting tired off and feels convinced with the idea that life is vain and futile without Zahir. Finally, the narrator accepts existence of Zahir as “I accept the Zahir, and will let it lead me into a state of either holiness or madness” (61). The Narrator creates madness inside his thought for *The Zahir*. The narrator is haunted by her remembrances throughout the text. Zahir is the only reason for that the narrator is living- He accepts Zahir as a crying child accepts its mother. Throughout the life, first time, he accepts the love, loving someone than himself, is really miraculous, which did by Zahir. This wisdom has come with him after a long chain of ups and down in his life. He does not feel comfortable anywhere, he sees darkness, emptiness and absurdity without Zahir.

Zahir a postmodern female is the true and honest friend of the narrator’s life, whom he thought as:

Our true friends are those who are with us when the good things happen. They cheer us in us on and are pleased by our triumphs. False friends only appear at difficult times, with their sad, supportive faces, when, in fact, our sufferings is serving to console them for their miserable lives. (65)

What a pleasing thought about friendship. Really, a nice and honest friend comes only in our happiest moment to makes us happy and prosperous like Zahir in the narrator's life. But the false friend comes in a difficult time to end our cheers into tears.

I respected her decision to leave, but the very person who had helped me build my life had very nearly destroyed me, she had always been so brave: why this time, had she fled like a thief in the night, without looking her husband in the eye and explaining why? (85)

To the narrator, he was all right in the matter of conjugal life since he never disagreed with her decision while being with him. This respect for her decision is because of her great sacrifices and help in building up his life. Later on Zahir destroys his life as she left him so secretly that even he did not know initially about it. His above statement makes it clear that his life was completely dependent on her presence in his life. But, in fact the narrator overplays her role into his life. In case she was so significant in his life, he would remain faithful to their marriage commitments and honest in the sexual intercourse as well. But the case is quite contradictory and he is found to have flirted and shown being in love with multiple women who came into his life from time to life. It is his hypocrisy that he regrets and feels sorry for the present situation.

The narrator's understanding about love is true that one's life becomes meaningful when the person loves somebody else more than oneself. Thus, he is enlivened in the matter of love and life. The narrator understands the significance of love

and how it affects all aspect of human life. He says, “Love is an untamed force. When we try to control it, it destroys us. When we try to imprison it, it enslaves us. When we try to understand it, it leaves us feeling lost and confused” (92). The narrator sees grandeur in love and takes it as an energetic source and force that affects human life.

Well, Esther fills every space of in my life; I thought that by writing about my feelings, I would free myself from her presence. Now I love her in a more silent way, but I cannot think about anything else. I beg you, please, I will do anything you want, but I need you to explain to me why she disappeared like that. (100)

The narrator continues to try to keep the same life as when his wife was still around. But becomes preoccupied with finding out why she left. The insanity continues and becomes an obsession making even the most lighthearted task unfathomable. He reminds himself of her support, which he at the time took for granted. She becomes the reason why he was now, a famous writer. He says:

I want her to look me in the eye and tell me why she left. Only then will I be free of *The Zahir*. Otherwise, I will go on thinking about her day and night, night and day, going over and over, our story, our history, again and again, trying to pinpoint the moment when I went wrong and our paths began to diverge. (107)

The narrator cannot forget her wherever he is whatever job he is doing. The image of Esther comes and strikes him everywhere and anytime. He does not know why she left him so secretly and he left alone in the pool of anxiety and frustration. In fact, a human's life becomes crucial when she/he away from the concerned people.

Mikhail, friend or perhaps a lover of the Zahir, tells about Esther :

Physically, she is a long away, in central Asia. Spiritually, she is very close, accompanying me day and night with her smile and the memory of her enthusiastic words. She was the one who brought me here, a poor 21-years-old with no future, an aberration in the eyes of the people in my village, or else a madman or some sort of shaman who had made a pact with the devil, and in the eyes of the people in the city, a mere peasant looking for work. (143)

Zahir is not only the closest and nearest wife of the narrator but also, she is a very good friend and lover of the Mikhail, whom she brought from Kazakhstan to Europe. In fact, they are separated for a long time, but still Mikhail spiritually loves her. Zahir is a source of enthusiasm, lover, courage and good partner for these two males.

The narrator is eager to meet Zahir. He wants to ask her the questions why she left him. Only after getting answer, he will be free. Until and unless, he is in the deep dreaming of *The Zahir*. He further says:

I'm saying that, during the time I spent in hospital, I came to realize that I was always looking for myself in the women I loved. I looked at their lovely, clean faces and saw myself reflected in them. They, on the other hand, looking at me and saw the dirt on my face and, however intelligent or self-confident they were, they ended up seeing themselves reflected in me and thinking that they were worse than they were. Please don't let that happen to you. (179)

As a hedonist, the narrator is running after women and trying to see his face in theirs. All these things he does for discovering self and to understand who he is. After all, being unsure of his self-identity, he is dedicated to create his self and expose him a human being who deserves value and meaning. Thus, the narrator keeps on making efforts to discover his alienated life that is far left by women he has ever been in love.

The narrators excitement towards Esther shows how much he is burning for the love of Zahir is shown by this statement, "please, you must understand what I have been going through for the last year or more. I am no threat to your relationship with Esther. I just need a couple of hours with her, or one hour, it doesn't matter" (109). For the narrator, the relationship of his wife with another man is not a threatening one. He accepts it and begs one hour to meet his wife Zahir, It shows the collapse of the male ego in front of a bold and courageous women Zahir. He state ahead as:

Dear Lady, when I look at the cars, the shop windows, and the people oblivious to everyone else, when I look at all the buildings and the monuments, I see in them your absence. Make us capable of bringing you back. (273)

The narrator accepts her absence, as he was so depressed and disappointed. Finally, he starts to search for her in his journey. For him, hope is far than despair. Now, he starts to feel her spiritual absence too. Moreover, the narrator prays for her bringing which is almost impossible for him. He mentions again as:

For two years, my life has consisted of nothing but the Zahir. Since I met you, I have been following a long –forgotten path, an abandoned railway track with grass growing between the rails, but which can still be used by trains. I haven't yet reached the final station, so I have no way of stopping along the way. (285)

It's about the narrator's journey, a journey to search his beloved wife Zahir and next a journey of his own self-exploration. In both cases, he is in the midst of the path. Still, he does not get the final station of his life that is Zahir and his own wisdom.

These feelings come up in the absence of Zahir. So, the text thoroughly presents about Zahir. The narrator thinks the world will become real when man learn how to love. He further says about love: "This force is on earth to make us happy, to bring us closer

god and to our neighbor, and yet given the way that we love now, we enjoy one hour of anxiety for every minute of peace” (92).The narrator compares love with Esther, his wife, and accepts value, meaning and spirit of love and Zahir. The narrator knows that love makes our life happy and meaningful.

I still am, but that did not just make me travel across the Kazakhstan steppes: it made me travel through the whole of my past life. I saw where I went wrong, I saw where I stopped, I saw the moment when I lost Esther, the moment that Mexican Indians call the accommodator-“the giving up point”. I experienced things I never imagined I would experience at my age. And all because you were by my side, guiding me, even though you might not have been aware that you were. (325)

Zahir, guides the narrator for his mistakes. In the absence of Zahir, he improved himself for her love. It is not his physical journey to Kazakhstan but it is also his spiritual journey that leads him to the nearest side of Esther. In the past, the narrator commits various mistakes, but he feels proud for it. But time ruins his thought and he realizes the mistake he committed in the past. In addition, for this improvement, the narrator thanks Zahir, whose presence of absence guides his life thoroughly.

I handed him the reins of my horse then walked the hundred meters’ that separated me from the women who had been my wife, had then become

the Zahir, and who was once more the beloved whom all men dream of finding when they return from war or from work. (330)

The narrator is eager to meet his wife, Zahir. It shows the love of a husband towards his wife. How much a wife is important for a man is shown in “had been my wife, had then becomes the Zahir” (330). Wife is not only a source of pleasure but also she is the necessity of the male counterparts is here felt by the narrator.

The narrator associates Zahir with Esther, proudly acclaims that his Zahir is Esther, and further vitalizes this name as well. The narrator says it has a certain identity and position in the society. Thus, He keeps on adoring her in all ways. The narrator says, “My Zahir is not a romantic metaphor, a blind man, a compass, a tiger, or a coin. It has a name and her name is Esther” (51). In Arabic language, Zahir means the visible. It means things that appear and people can vision them. In that sense, his Esther is now in his eyes and can see into her mind and heart.

One day because of women, I made a long pilgrimage in order to find my dream. Many years later, the same women had made me set off again, this time to find the man who had got lost along the way. (334)

At first, Zahir takes him and set off to a pilgrimage for his career. However, the next time, he set off to search the Zahir, who disperse him. This proves that how much he needs Zahir. She is the one who only deserve love, trust and guidance of the narrator’s

life. Without her, his life is vacuum and futile. Zahir is really a statue of love. Finally, being postmodern women, Zahir shows her sensitiveness, feelings, emotions towards him. She states ahead, “I waited as Penelope waited for Ulysses, as Romeo waited for Juliet, as Beatrice waited for Dante” (336).

At last, the narrator achieves her. And he realizes the true acceptance, love of a Partner. In addition, he starts to accept everything what he does not want. The narrator is waiting her like a desperate wife. When He meets her, he says:

I embraced her, rested my head on her shoulder, and began to cry. She stroked my hair and by the way, she touched me. I began to understand what I did not understand; I began to accept what I did not want to accept. (336)

Here, the cries of the narrator are the cry of true lover, an honest husband and a true Person. First time he feels the sense of sensuality. Moreover, these all happens in the process to gain Zahir. Finally, he seems changed. The narrator began to understand and accept what he did not. An empowered women Zahir, becomes success to awake a hypocrite male. This is really an adventure and appreciated work of the Zahir.

At the very beginning, he seems as a very hedonist type of person, but at the end of the novel, we can find him as a philosopher of pain, love and life. The narrator defines

this term in various ways. He even feels suffering in love. Ultimately, the love of Zahir creates him as a philosopher. He further says:

Suffering occurs when we want other people to love us in away we imagine. We want to be loved, and not in the way that love should manifest itself free and untrammled, guiding us with its force and driving us on. (337)

Without Zahir the life of the narrator becomes absurd. She is the one, a woman for him almost a toy for enjoyment realizes him the real value of a partner, specially a woman partner, love, the meaning of marital life, which he always avoids. In the absence of Zahir, he feels suffering, pain, and ache. Therefore, she is really a stronger woman whose absence creates on him a passion of winds, thunder. Zahir is succeeded to change a selfish creature to a good human being.

When they meet each other after a long time, they really felt enthusiasm too. Being a wife of a celebrated artist, Zahir loves another man without any hesitation and fear and she accept it easily. When the narrator asked her “Do you love him”, she replies, “yes I did” (337). When he heard that his wife is pregnant by another man, he becomes quiet. But, suddenly he accepts it as a punishment for his mistakes. At the end, the postmodern female Zahir makes him able to accept what he did not. Therefore, Zahir is the hero of the novel who bends him in front of her. In the surface level the story is about,

unnamed narrator but in deep down it is about Zahir, a radical feminist who successes to
throw a patriarchal thought of a hedonist male

Chapter IV

Conclusion

The Zahir by Paulo Coelho shows the issues and idea of feminism. The story is about renowned authors who discover that his wife; a war correspondent has disappeared, leaving no trace. Was she kidnapped, blackmailed, or simply bored with their marriage? The unrest she causes is as strong as the attraction she exerts. The narrator comes across Mikhail, one of Esther's friends. The narrator with his help realizes that to find Esther, He must find his own self. Mikhail introduces him to a tribe who has unconventional ways of living. Through the narrator's journey from Paris to Kazakhstan; Coelho explores various meanings of love and life.

Hence it gets clear that Esther was not happy and did not feel free in his company. He is sure that she was undergoing some sort of mental turbulence and trail that he could not understand. In case she wanted to go and search freedom outside the marriage life, there would be some kind of misunderstanding and conflict that needed common understanding but no conversation took place. Meantime, the narrator did not make efforts to stop her from going outside. He even did not offer choice but simply kept silent without any concern. Now he regrets that he should have asked her whether he choose to be a war correspondent or remain at home as his lovely and faithful wife. Thus, his self is shattered and roving in the crooked way. There is normalcy into his life though he tries to find some sort of meaning into it.

Zahir seems as strong as the hero in this story. Initially the presence of Esther in his life is probably wearisome and alarming; this is why he even feels happy while Esther

is away from him. But when she disappeared, the narrator regrets that he should have been able to understand her feeling and freed her to do what she liked. Thus, he reflect on each and every that he did in the company of Esther before she left him and went somewhere he does not know. He memorizes the time Esther was with him.

The narrator's search for her-and for the truth of his own life-takes him from France to Spain, Croatia, and eventually, the bleakly beautiful landscape of central Asia. More than that, it takes him from the safety of his world to the totally unknown path, searching for a new understanding of the nature of love, power of destiny and needs of a female partner.

Zahir in Arabic means visibility, present, incapable of going unnoticed. It is someone or something which, once we have come onto contact with them, gradually occupies our every thought, until we can think of nothing else. The narrator enhances his wife Esther, as Zahir, whose losing creates madness inside him. To solve this maddening condition he searches his wife as well as his self. Ultimately, after lots of pain and sufferings, he achieves *The Zahir*. On the other hand, Zahir is successes to create her identity. She leaves traces of her rememberances which makes on him philosophical statements about matrimony and its measures and challenges.

With *The Zahir*, Paulo Coelho demonstrates not just his powerful and captivating story- telling but also his extraordinary insight into what it is to be a human being in a world full of possibility. In the conclusion, Zahir a woman becomes really a Zahir of the

narrator's eyes, no one ignore it even the narrator too. The narrator does every act or action throughout the story but the real agent is Zahir for these actions. Thus, Zahir is a postmodern woman with multiple personalities. With the traces of obsession, fame and the rigid possibility of forgetting oneself, the story presents concrete options on how to lose oneself in order to find oneself.

Zahir being a heroine of this novel, fights for her existence and dignity, it shows that she has the qualities of postmodern feminist. As Zahir breaks the essentialist definition of feminity and worked as an existentialist woman. According to the traditional notion of the society, married women remain within her husband's house is broken here by the Zahir. She assumes, women and feminity is constructed through language, she criticizes it calling as it is nothing than for women's subordination. Like Postmodern feminist, she tackles the global issues such as; she educates the uneducated people of the remote area and becomes the war correspondent for Iraq. She Propagates the views related to gendered based biased and discrimination. Zahir feels glad and content with her female condition, is a feature of postmodern heroine.

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