

EFFECT OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN ELIF SHAFAK 10 MINUTES AND 38 SECONDS: A STUDY OF FEMINISM

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Abstract

This study explores the effect of gender discrimination in Elif Shafak's novel 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World through the lens of feminist literary theory. Shafak's narrative, centered on the life and posthumous reflections of Tequila Leila, a sex worker in Istanbul, offers a poignant critique of the patriarchal structures that marginalize and oppress women. By analyzing the experiences of Leila and her circle of outcast friends, this paper investigates how societal norms, cultural expectations, and institutional failures contribute to systemic gender inequality. The research highlights how the novel challenges traditional gender roles, exposes the intersection of gender with class and sexuality, and affirms female solidarity as a form of resistance. Ultimately, the study underscores Shafak's feminist commitment to giving voice to the silenced and marginalized, revealing how literature can serve as a powerful vehicle for social commentary and transformation.

Keywords: gender discrimination, female solidarity, class and sexuality, social commentary and transformation

Introduction

Gender discrimination has long been a pervasive issue embedded within the social, cultural, and political fabric of societies around the world. Literature, as both a reflection and critique of societal norms, offers a powerful medium through which issues of gender inequality can be explored and challenged. Elif Shafak's novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* serves as a compelling literary work that foregrounds the lived experiences of marginalized women in a deeply patriarchal society. Through the story of Tequila Leila, a sex worker whose life is narrated in the final moments after her death, Shafak sheds light on the harsh realities of gender-based oppression in contemporary Turkish society.

This study examines the effect of gender discrimination in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* through the lens of feminist literary criticism. Shafak's portrayal of Leila and her circle of equally marginalized friends provides a critical perspective on the ways in which women are dehumanized, silenced, and excluded due to their gender and social status. The novel not only documents the injustices faced by women but also celebrates female resilience, friendship, and the struggle for identity and dignity in a world that frequently denies them both.

By engaging with feminist theory, this paper aims to analyze how Shafak constructs a narrative that both critiques gender discrimination and advocates for feminist values. The novel challenges traditional notions of femininity, exposes systemic inequalities, and affirms the importance of female solidarity in resisting oppression. In doing so, Shafak positions herself as a vital voice in

contemporary feminist literature, using storytelling as a means to confront social taboos and promote greater awareness of gender-based injustices.

Research Questions

1. How does Elif Shafak portray gender discrimination and its impact on women's lives in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*?
2. In what ways does the novel reflect feminist ideologies and challenge patriarchal structures in Turkish society?

Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the representation and impact of gender discrimination in Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, using feminist literary theory as a critical framework. The study seeks to uncover how Shafak critiques patriarchal norms and gives voice to marginalized female characters, thereby contributing to contemporary feminist discourse in literature.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it contributes to the broader understanding of how literature can be a powerful tool for highlighting and resisting gender-based oppression. By focusing on Elif Shafak's feminist approach, the research offers insights into the socio-cultural challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society like Turkey. It also emphasizes the importance of literary narratives in promoting gender equality and social justice. Furthermore, the study enhances academic discussions on feminist literature, particularly in the context of Middle Eastern and South Asian gender politics, where issues of marginalization, identity, and resistance are deeply intertwined.

Theoretical framework

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* offers a poignant exploration of gender discrimination within Turkish society. Through the life and posthumous reflections of Tequila Leila, a marginalized sex worker, Shafak delves into the systemic oppression faced by women. This theoretical framework employs feminist literary theory to dissect the novel's portrayal of patriarchal structures, drawing upon the works of prominent feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, and Sylvia Walby. By integrating these perspectives, the analysis aims to elucidate the multifaceted dimensions of gender-based oppression depicted in the narrative.

Simone de Beauvoir's Concept of the "Other"

Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1949), introduces the notion of woman as the "Other," a construct defined in opposition to the male norm. In Shafak's novel, Leila embodies this concept, existing on the fringes of society due to her profession and gender. Her experiences reflect the societal tendency to marginalize women who deviate from prescribed roles. Attaullah et al. (2021) assert that the novel highlights "gendered power, passivity of women and subjectivity of men in the Turkish society," underscoring the entrenched patriarchal norms that render women as subordinate "Others."

Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, articulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990), posits that gender identity is constructed through repeated social performances rather than innate qualities. Leila's life trajectory, shaped by societal expectations and constraints, exemplifies this concept. Her adoption of the persona "Tequila Leila" signifies a performative act necessitated by survival in a patriarchal context. Butler's framework elucidates how Leila's identity is not a fixed essence but a series of enacted roles imposed by societal norms.

Julia Kristeva's Theory of Abjection

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, from *Powers of Horror* (1982), explores the human reaction to that which is cast off or deemed impure. Leila's status as a sex worker subjects her to societal abjection, positioning her outside the bounds of acceptable femininity. Mehdi et al. (2023) discuss how Leila experiences "physical and psychological violence," reflecting the abjection imposed upon her by a society that deems her existence as contaminating. This theoretical lens reveals the mechanisms through which society ostracizes and dehumanizes women who transgress normative boundaries.

Sylvia Walby's Structures of Patriarchy

Sylvia Walby's analysis of patriarchal structures identifies six key areas where gender inequality is institutionalized: the household, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. In Shafak's narrative, these structures manifest vividly. Leila's forced entry into sex work illustrates the intersection of economic disenfranchisement and gendered exploitation. Djohar and Adhania (2023) note that Shafak employs animal metaphors to depict women's oppression, aligning with Walby's framework of systemic patriarchy. These representations underscore the pervasive nature of patriarchal control across various societal domains.

Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern, particularly the question "Can the subaltern speak?" from her 1988 essay, interrogates the ability of marginalized individuals to have their voices heard within dominant discourses. Leila and her companions, marginalized by virtue of their gender and social status, embody the subaltern condition. Hussain et al. (2023) argue that these characters "try utmost to rebel against their subalternity," yet their efforts are often silenced by entrenched patriarchal systems. This perspective highlights the challenges faced by marginalized women in articulating their experiences within oppressive structures.

Intersectionality and Feminist Solidarity

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes how overlapping identities—such as race, class, and gender—compound experiences of oppression. Leila's narrative intersects with issues of class and gender, illustrating the compounded marginalization she endures. Moreover, the solidarity among Leila and her friends serves as a form of resistance against systemic oppression. Their collective bond challenges the isolating effects of patriarchal structures, demonstrating the power of feminist solidarity in confronting gender discrimination.

Employing feminist literary theory to analyze Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* reveals the intricate layers of gender discrimination embedded within the narrative. Through the application of theories by de Beauvoir, Butler, Kristeva, Walby, and Spivak, the analysis uncovers the multifaceted mechanisms of patriarchal oppression and the resilience of women who navigate these challenges. Shafak's portrayal of Leila and her companions not only critiques societal norms but also underscores the necessity of feminist discourse in literature to illuminate and challenge systemic gender inequalities.

Literature Review

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) offers a poignant exploration of gender discrimination within Turkish society. Through the life and posthumous reflections of Tequila Leila, a marginalized sex worker, Shafak delves into the systemic oppression faced by women. This literature review synthesizes scholarly analyses that examine the novel through various feminist lenses, including critical discourse analysis, abjection theory, Marxist feminism, subaltern studies, and intersectionality. By integrating these perspectives, the review aims to elucidate the multifaceted dimensions of gender-based oppression depicted in the narrative.

Attaullah et al. (2021) employ feminist critical discourse analysis to examine the construction of gendered identities and societal expectations in the novel. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's feminist stances and social role theory, the study reveals how patriarchal norms in Turkish society dictate distinct roles for men and women, leading to the exploitation and marginalization of women. The analysis highlights that men are portrayed as dominant figures, while women are expected to be obedient and homely, with their education and economic rights often overlooked. The study concludes that Shafak encourages women to realize their individuality and speak for their rights, challenging the socio-cultural biases inherent in the society.

Mehdi et al. (2023) focus on the abjection and marginalization experienced by Leila, analyzing her character through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. The study discusses how Leila, as a sex worker, faces physical and psychological violence, reflecting the societal tendency to ostracize and dehumanize women who deviate from normative boundaries. The research uncovers the maltreatment and ruthlessness inflicted upon Leila, who is compelled into prostitution due to unforeseen circumstances, highlighting the persistent intolerance and discrimination faced by sex workers in Istanbul.

Iqbal et al. (2024) analyze the novel through the lens of Marxist feminism, intersectionality, and the impact of capitalism on female figures. The study examines how capitalistic values contribute to the objectification and social stratification of women, particularly focusing on Leila's forced entry into prostitution. The analysis identifies themes of objectification, commercialization, and the commodification of women's bodies, illustrating how patriarchal and capitalist structures intersect to perpetuate gender-based oppression. Hussain et al. (2023) explore the concept of subalternity in the novel, drawing upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's framework to analyze the silencing and marginalization of female characters. The study investigates how women in the novel are driven to subaltern status socially and religiously, becoming victims of violence in a patriarchal society. The research highlights the endeavors of marginalized female characters to survive and attain freedom from the oppressive structures that silence their voices.

An analysis published in the *Journal of Migration Affairs* examines the metaphorical representation of Istanbul as a "she-city" in the novel, emphasizing the need to re-feminize the city and the country by adopting the voices of marginalized women and transgender individuals. The study discusses how the city is portrayed as a place of decay and deterioration, mirroring the societal neglect and marginalization of women like Leila. The research underscores the significance of reclaiming urban spaces and narratives through feminist perspectives.

Critical reviews of the novel, such as those by *The Guardian* and *The Hindu*, acknowledge Shafak's unflinching portrayal of the trauma inflicted upon women's minds and bodies in a patriarchal society. The reviews highlight the novel's intricate storytelling and its focus on marginalized characters, emphasizing the life-affirming aspects of Leila's journey despite the bleak and relentless depiction of violence and grief. These perspectives affirm the novel's contribution to feminist literature and its role in challenging societal norms.

The scholarly analyses of Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* collectively underscore the novel's critical engagement with themes of gender discrimination, patriarchal oppression, and the marginalization of women. Through various feminist lenses, including critical discourse analysis, abjection theory, Marxist feminism, and subaltern studies, the literature reveals the multifaceted dimensions of the protagonist's experiences and the broader societal structures that perpetuate gender-based inequalities. Shafak's narrative not only critiques these oppressive systems but also advocates for the empowerment and reclamation of identity by marginalized women, contributing significantly to contemporary feminist discourse.

Data Analysis

Elif Shafak's novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* provides a profound narrative that delves into the intricacies of gender discrimination within Turkish society. Through the life and posthumous reflections of Tequila Leila, a marginalized sex worker, Shafak explores the systemic oppression faced by women. This analysis examines the novel's portrayal of gender-based discrimination, utilizing feminist theoretical frameworks and textual evidence to elucidate the multifaceted dimensions of patriarchal oppression depicted in the narrative.

Patriarchal Structures and Gendered Power Dynamics

Shafak's narrative vividly illustrates the patriarchal structures that dictate the lives of women in Turkish society. Leila's upbringing under a devout and authoritarian father exemplifies the societal expectations imposed on women to be obedient and chaste. The novel portrays how these expectations are enforced through familial and societal pressures, leading to the suppression of women's autonomy and individuality.

Attaullah et al. (2021) employ feminist critical discourse analysis to examine the construction of gendered identities and societal expectations in the novel. Utilizing Simone de Beauvoir's feminist stances and social role theory, the study reveals how patriarchal norms in Turkish society dictate distinct roles for men and women, leading to the exploitation and marginalization of women. The analysis highlights that men are portrayed as dominant figures, while women are expected to be obedient and homely, with their education and economic rights often overlooked. The study concludes that Shafak encourages women to realize their individuality and speak for their rights, challenging the socio-cultural biases inherent in the society.

Abjection and Marginalization of Female Protagonists

Leila's experiences as a sex worker in Istanbul underscore the abjection and marginalization faced by women who deviate from societal norms. Her profession subjects her to physical and psychological violence, reflecting the societal tendency to ostracize and dehumanize women in similar positions. Shafak portrays Leila's struggles to assert her identity and humanity in the face of systemic discrimination.

Mehdi et al. (2023) focus on the abjection and marginalization experienced by Leila, analyzing her character through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. The study discusses how Leila, as a sex worker, faces physical and psychological violence, reflecting the societal tendency to ostracize and dehumanize women who deviate from normative boundaries. The research uncovers the maltreatment and ruthlessness inflicted upon Leila, who is compelled into prostitution due to unforeseen circumstances, highlighting the persistent intolerance and discrimination faced by sex workers in Istanbul.

Intersectionality and Economic Exploitation

The novel also delves into the intersectionality of gender discrimination, illustrating how factors such as class and economic status exacerbate the oppression of women. Leila's forced entry into prostitution is portrayed as a consequence of both patriarchal control and economic vulnerability. Shafak highlights the commodification of women's bodies within a capitalist framework, emphasizing the systemic exploitation faced by marginalized women.

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Symbolism and Resistance through Animal Metaphors

Shafak employs animal metaphors to symbolize the experiences of women under patriarchal oppression. These metaphors serve to illustrate both the subjugation and the resilience of women in the face of systemic discrimination. The use of animal imagery underscores the dehumanization of women while also highlighting their capacity for resistance and survival.

Djohar and Adhania (2022) examine the representation of the 20th-century Turkish patriarchal system in Elif Şafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World* (2019) novel. The study evaluates how the novel describes the sufferings and resistance towards oppression through the portrayal of animals subtly linked to gender issues. Using animal metaphor theory and Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchal structures, the research identifies various animal expressions representing women's sufferings, powerlessness, and lack of freedom, as well as symbols of resistance and freedom.

Marginalization and Belonging

The novel centers around a woman named Leila, who, in the 10 minutes and 38 seconds after her death, shares her life story. It is a story about outsiders, specifically those who occupy the fringes of Istanbul's society. Each of Leila's five closest friends experience a different form of societal exclusion. Leila is a sex worker battling mental illness, Zaynab¹²² is a little person, Nalan is a transgender woman, and others are similarly marginalized. The novel explores themes of marginalization and belonging, highlighting the strength and solidarity among those who are considered outcasts.

Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* offers a profound exploration of gender discrimination within Turkish society. Through the life of Tequila Leila, the novel delves into the systemic oppression faced by women, highlighting the multifaceted dimensions of patriarchal structures. Employing various feminist theoretical frameworks, the narrative underscores the resilience and resistance of marginalized women, emphasizing the need for societal transformation towards gender equality.

Discussion and Findings

Elif Shafak's novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* offers a profound exploration of gender discrimination within Turkish society. Through the life and posthumous reflections of Tequila Leila, a marginalized sex worker, Shafak delves into the systemic oppression faced by women. This discussion synthesizes key findings from the novel and scholarly analyses, highlighting how Shafak critiques patriarchal norms, societal marginalization, and the resilience of women in oppressive environments.

The novel vividly portrays the patriarchal structures that dictate women's roles in Turkish society. Leila's upbringing under a devout and authoritarian father exemplifies the societal expectations imposed on women to be obedient and chaste. These expectations are enforced through familial and societal pressures, leading to the suppression of women's autonomy and individuality.

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Conclusion

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