



Deconstructing Gendered Oppression: A Comparative Study Of Masculinity And Femininity In Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* And Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds In This Strange World*

¹Ms. D. Janani, ²Dr. S. Sudha

¹MA English Literature, ²Associate Professor,

¹English Department

Dr. NGP Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, India

Abstract: This study explores the intertwined struggles of Kali and Leila, protagonists from Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* and Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, who resist patriarchal oppression in distinct yet interconnected ways. Kali's identity is reduced to his reproductive ability, illustrating the rigid expectations of masculinity within his rural Tamil society. His inability to father a child diminishes his self-worth, exposing the limitations of patriarchal definitions of manhood. Conversely, Leila's defiance of societal norms regarding morality, sexuality, and respectability renders her body a site of strict social control. Her journey reveals the systemic oppression that restricts female autonomy under the guise of cultural propriety. By juxtaposing these narratives, this paper examines how patriarchal structures dehumanize both men and women, enforcing restrictive social roles that suppress individuality and freedom. Through a comparative analysis, the study underscores the urgent need to dismantle these oppressive frameworks, advocating for a reevaluation of gender norms that prioritize autonomy and equality over rigid societal expectations. Murugan and Shafak's narratives challenge the conventional constructs of masculinity and femininity, exposing the far-reaching consequences of patriarchal oppression. This paper argues for a broader, more inclusive discourse on identity and self-worth, moving beyond reproductive and moral roles to a more liberated and equitable social framework.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Gender Norms, Masculinity, Femininity, Oppression, Autonomy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Societal conventions and expectations have long dictated people's roles, often leaving little room for personal autonomy or self-expression. These norms are rooted in patriarchal institutions that impose rigid standards on men and women, shaping their identities and destinies. Men are expected to be strong, dominant providers, their worth often measured by external achievements and their ability to fulfill familial responsibilities. Conversely, women's identities are primarily defined by relationships and adherence to traditional values, confining them within expectations of purity, subordination, and self-sacrifice. This systematic inequity reduces individuals to mere functions within a larger societal mechanism, depriving them of agency and self-determination.

II. THE CRUSHING WEIGHT OF PATRIARCHAL MASCULINITY IN *ONE PART WOMAN*

Kali, the protagonist of Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*, exemplifies the crushing weight of masculinity expectations. His identity is inextricably linked to his inability to father a child, a perceived failure that diminishes his status in his rural Tamil community. Patriarchal norms define masculinity strictly through reproductive success, reducing Kali's worth to his inability to fulfill this role. As Wendy Wood and Alice H. Eagly assert, patriarchal societies impose rigid definitions of masculinity in which "men are valued primarily for their productivity and dominance" (705). Murugan underscores this notion by portraying Kali as trapped in his reproductive incompetence, stripped of agency and self-worth.

Kali's struggles extend beyond personal despair; they affect his relationships, particularly his marriage to Ponna. Despite their love, the absence of a child casts a shadow over their union, reinforcing the toxic idea that masculinity is measured solely by material or biological achievements rather than emotional depth. The sociological concept of the "Patriarchy Index" highlights how deeply entrenched patriarchal structures prioritize male dominance and reproductive roles over individual fulfillment (Stephen et al. 19). Murugan critiques these norms, advocating for a more humane understanding of masculinity that values emotional and moral attributes.

The emotional burden Kali endures is encapsulated in Murugan's words: "The elders said a house without a child is no house at all. It is an empty, ruined place" (47). This statement reflects societal pressures that undermine Kali and Ponna's relationship by imposing external expectations on their personal lives. Through Kali's decline into loneliness and despair, *One Part Woman* exposes the psychological harm inflicted by rigid gender norms and calls for a reevaluation of patriarchal values.

III. PATRIARCHAL CONTROL AND FEMALE AUTONOMY IN *10 MINUTES 38 SECONDS IN THIS STRANGE WORLD*

In Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Leila's body becomes a battleground for patriarchal control, illustrating how societal norms regulate women's lives. From a young age, Leila is subjected to moral and behavioral expectations, her worth contingent on compliance with cultural standards. Her decision to break free from her oppressive family reflects an act of defiance against these constraints. Shafak challenges the notion that a woman's identity should be dictated by societal perceptions of morality and honor. Instead, Leila's journey underscores the importance of agency and self-determination in the face of systemic oppression.

Leila's struggles highlight the ways in which patriarchal control marginalizes women and reduces them to symbols of purity or disgrace. Despite her attempts to establish an independent identity, she remains an outcast, reinforcing the patriarchal notion that a woman's value is socially constructed. Rehman Sudais observes that patriarchal structures "utilize societal constructs to control women's bodies and diminish their autonomy" (Sudais 3). Leila's suffering is not a result of personal failings but rather systemic inequalities that penalize women who defy conventional expectations.

Shafak critiques patriarchal hypocrisy through Leila's experiences, as illustrated in the statement: "No woman had ever had the right to control her own body, not fully. The streets were named after men, the markets were run by men, and even the brothels where women worked were owned by men" (137). This passage underscores the institutionalized oppression that governs women's lives, exposing the power structures that limit female autonomy. Through Leila's resistance, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* offers a powerful critique of gendered oppression and the necessity for societal change.

IV. FROM TAMIL NADU TO ISTANBUL: THE UNIVERSAL IMPACT OF PATRIARCHAL SYSTEMS

The experiences of Kali and Leila reveal how patriarchal systems dehumanize both men and women by imposing rigid gender norms. Kali's worth is dictated by his reproductive success, leading to social exclusion and personal despair. Similarly, Leila's body and choices are scrutinized and controlled, rendering her a symbol of societal shame. As noted in *Gender Through the Lens of Culture*, patriarchal societies "reinforce gendered hierarchies that limit individual potential" (Springer 45). Both characters challenge these constraints, exposing the universal impact of patriarchal oppression.

Through a cross-cultural lens, Murugan and Shafak highlight the pervasiveness of patriarchy. While Kali's struggles reflect rural Tamil Nadu's traditional expectations of masculinity, Leila's experiences in Istanbul showcase the modern challenges women face in resisting moral policing and societal condemnation. Despite cultural differences, both novels demonstrate how deeply ingrained gender norms suppress individuality and personal freedom.

Conclusion

The narratives of *One Part Woman* and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* emphasize the urgent need to dismantle patriarchal structures that restrict identity and self-worth. Kali's masculinity is reduced to reproductive capability, while Leila's autonomy is policed by societal expectations. Their struggles expose the flaws of a system that equates worth with rigid gender roles. As Stephen Knight argues, "challenging these systems requires a critical reevaluation of cultural norms and the dismantling of gendered hierarchies" (12). Both Murugan and Shafak advocate for this reexamination, urging society to value individuality over oppressive conventions.

The intertwined experiences of Kali and Leila reveal the dehumanizing effects of patriarchal tyranny, showing how restrictive social norms limit both men and women. By juxtaposing these narratives, Murugan and Shafak challenge the societal constructs that uphold inequality, calling for a more liberated and inclusive vision of gender identity. Their works serve as potent critiques of oppressive traditions, offering hope for a future in which self-worth is determined by personal freedom rather than conformity to outdated gender norms.

REFERENCES

- [1] Knight, Stephen. *Gender and Power: The Persistence of Patriarchy*. Cambridge University Press, 2020
- [2] Murugan, Perumal. *One Part Woman*. Translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan, Penguin Books, 2018.
- [3] Shafak, Elif. *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*. Penguin Books, 2019.
- [4] Springer, Kelly. *Gender Through the Lens of Culture: Societal Constructs and Their Consequences*. Oxford University Press, 2021.
- [5] Stephen, Jenna, et al. "Measuring Patriarchal Structures: The Patriarchy Index." *Gender and Society*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2019, pp. 19-45.
- [6] Sudais, Rehman. "Patriarchal Structures and Women's Autonomy: A Feminist Analysis." *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2020, pp. 1-15.
- [7] Wood, Wendy, and Alice H. Eagly. "Biosocial Construction of Sex Differences and Similarities in Behavior." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 46, 2013, pp. 55-123.