



# Gender Roles in Turkish Society: A Journey through Elif Shafak's *Honour* and *The Forty Rules of Love*

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**Abstract**— Through her novels “*Honour*” and “*The Forty Rules of Love*” Elif Shafak brings forth differential roles assigned to men and women in Turkish society. These novels analyze how society conditions boys and girls from a very young age to conform to these roles. In patriarchal societies, women usually bear the brunt of such conditioning. These include restrictions placed on ambitions, clothing, choice of partners, reproductive rights behavior in public, etc. They are often forced to compromise their happiness for the sake of their family and society. Women who dare to follow their dreams are often faced with violence and some are even killed by their family members to regain family honour. The novel “*Honour*” examines the evil practice of honour killing which still exists in some parts of Turkish society. When women are found to diverge from accepted codes of conduct, the family members, usually the father or the brother, murder them to regain the lost honour of their family in society. Through the character of Ella Rubinstein in “*The Forty Rules of Love*” Elif Shafak, Shafak examines the discontented life led by women across the globe even while performing the dutiful roles of a wife or a mother. The author highlights the need to redefine gender roles based on individual happiness and norms of equality.



**Keywords**— Gender Roles, Elif Shafak, Turkish Society, Honour, The Forty Rules of Love.

Elif Shafak is one of the most popular contemporary Turkish writers and is widely read. She has the most distinct voices among the country's writers for her realistic portrayal of Turkish society and for using her works as a medium of raising voices for the lesser privileged. She writes about “marginalized, othered and subdued individuals in an attempt to reveal to the world that they do exist and that they have a voice they want to convey to the world” (Nihad, 14). Nihad also adds that the fact that she was raised in a society where women are treated as the “other” and “defined in relation with male relatives” (7) had a special bearing on her works. She used her works to explore the “silences” and talk about “the political, cultural, sexual taboos”. She says: “In all my novels there has been a continuous interest in both: the world of stories, magic and mysticism inside the house, and the world of politics, conflict, inequality and discrimination outside the window” (Shafak).

Shafak's novels have women as central characters and most of the stories are told from a female perspective. They discuss the role, outlook, and status of women in Turkish society. The novels contain the author's reflection on themes like the social status of women, marriage, identity, patriarchy, motherhood, religion, etc. Women and men seem to be under constant pressure to adhere to the norms of society and religion which often comes at the cost of

personal happiness. Women who deviate from accepted codes are subjected to social shaming and attain an inferior position in society. They are restrained and are dictated by these norms which never allow them to live life to the fullest. Men and women receive differential treatment and justice by society which sometimes even results in the death of women for simply choosing personal happiness over the norms dictated by society.

## Gender Roles

Traditionally, societies across the world have set roles for men and women based on assumed common characteristics/differences and gender stereotypes. Blackstone defines gender roles as “expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender” (336). As she points out, they are the end products of interactions between “individuals and their environments” which instill beliefs about “what sort of behavior is believed to be appropriate for what sex.”(336). Women, who are assumed to have more nurturing instincts, are assigned household chores and child-rearing duties. Men, who are believed to be stronger (mentally and physically) are given the responsibility to provide for the family and make important decisions. Kray and Howland believe that irrespective of the origin of gender roles

(historical or biological), they make "gender atypical behavior seem wrong" (99). Notions of gender roles are instilled from a very young age and they reaffirm the power status quo of men and women in society. Over the years, through increased awareness and feminist movements, women have ventured out of their traditional roles claiming increased participation in decision-making, in maintaining the economic well-being of the family, etc.

### Turkish Society and Culture

Turkey is geographically placed between Europe and Asia which has exposed it to both cultures making it a nation of duality. The country follows a peculiar combination of traditional and modern practices along with religious and secularist observations. Most of the population is urbanized yet religion and tradition play a major role in shaping gender roles. Although a comparatively liberal country, Turkish society is still torn between patriarchy and modernism. Patriarchy and religion are major influences that dictate gender roles in Turkish society. Deviations from accepted codes of conduct are often looked down upon and sometimes dealt with in violence.

As M Hakan Yavuz states Turkey is considered to have set a perfect example for the integration of "Islamic law into a relatively democratic political system" and thereby "preserved democracy and civil society" (63). Turkish society with mass education, the increasing influence of print media, and the shift in power from the "Ulema to urbanized university graduate" has witnessed a change in the social fabric and outlook of people (Yavuz 67). Islam also plays a major role in determining the gender equations in Turkish society. Mounira M Charrad notes, "Defining the rights and obligations of men and women in the family and by the extension in the community and society at large, Islamic law regulates marriage...divorce...custody of children...and inheritance rights."(420)

The family law in the Swiss civil code was adopted instead of the Islamic family law in 1926 which promoted civil marriages and abolished polygamy. The consent of the individuals who entered into a marriage relationship was also mandatory prohibiting relatives from 'arranging' marriages. However, the reality remains that many marriages still are arranged, sometimes without the consent of the brides.

Turkish society is largely patriarchal with female members remaining submissive. The father figure commands respect and makes all the important decisions of the household while the mother takes care of the household chores and the children. Boys are trained to be courageous, proud, and of superior status while girls are encouraged to be modest, submissive, skilled in domestic tasks, and honourable.

### Feminist movements in Turkey

The status of women in Turkey began to change with the advent of modernization through the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Efforts were made to ensure equal status of women in society under the leadership of President Mustafa Kemal who considered this of prime importance in the modernization process. Along with this, educated and elite women began to organize themselves with the formation of organizations like the Turkish Women's Union and claim an improvement in the status of women. Hence, the first wave of feminism in Turkey is considered

to coincide with Kemalism. (Diner and Toktas 3). Some of the changes adopted included recognition of her as a person equal to men, the right to vote, the banishment of polygamy, the ban on the burqa, equal rights in divorce, property, political rights, etc. It is noteworthy that Turkish women gained the right to suffrage much earlier than their counterparts in some European countries. Although feminism reached the lands of Turkey years later than the West, it spread with considerable momentum as it coincided with the modernization process. The first wave ended with the closing down of the Turkish Women's Union as it was considered no longer a necessity.

The second wave of feminism began in the 1980s with women demanding the elimination of violence and oppression especially in the family and the abolition of practices like virginity tests before marriage. The first mass all-women demonstration also took place during this period with thousands of women taking to the streets to protest against a judgment in a domestic violence case. The period also saw the birth of many organizations and campaigns which publicly protested against violence against women. There was also the emergence of hundreds of publications for women's causes and the establishment of women's studies departments in prominent universities. The wide range of organizations and their publications point towards a "heterogeneous nature of feminist movements" during this period which only achieved "relative success" (Leake 2). The period also saw the focus of feminist groups shifting to the entry of women into politics and the abolishment of discriminatory laws.

The period witnessed an Islamist renaissance following debates on the wearing of scarfs in public places which in turn led to the birth of Islamist feminism. Islamist women writers, activists, philosophers, researchers, lawyers, human rights defendants, etc. sought to deconstruct the misuse of the Koran which has been used to dominate women and confine them to the private sphere. They aimed to expose the manipulation of religious verses and sayings against women. The rise of a global civil society and the internationalization of women's organizations added further dimensions to the Kurdish and Islamist feminist positions.

The rise of Kurdish nationalism saw the development of another set of feminists referred to as the Kurdish nationalist feminist. The 1990's which saw the birth of various feminist groups is considered as the third wave of feminism in Turkey.

The secularist, identifying the threat from Islam as a weapon for oppositional forces, tried to suppress its influence with rigorous control over religious institutions. However, as Yavuz points out it "could not replace Islam with a new flexible code of conduct or aesthetic understanding of ordering everyday life" (66). Pro-Islamic forces formed the Justice Party (JP) first and then the National Order Party (NOP) later to restore the dominance of Islamic laws in day-to-day life. However, following the military coup, NOP was banned claiming it to be against "the secularist principles of the nation" and trying "to institute an Islamic order"(Yavuz, 66). Leaders of the military coup in the 1980s made extensive efforts to strengthen the religion by opening new religious schools, and courses, the appointment of imams, and imposing restrictions on opposing forces. As Yavuz highlights, the military leaders tried to infuse "Islamist ideas with national goals"

to create a "homogenous and less political Islamic community" (67).

Political parties such as National Salvation Party (NSP) and the Welfare Party have tried to put forth Islamic sentiments to the forefront. The Welfare Party has been successful to encourage Islamist and Kurdish groups to participate in the political arena.

Over the years, efforts towards modernization have brought a divide in Turkish society in terms of "modern versus traditional, progressive versus conservative, rationalist versus religious" (Yavuz, 63).

The amendment of the Turkish criminal law in 2004 by the AKP government was also seen as beneficial to women. Changes made by incorporating suggestions from various pro-women groups included stricter laws for sexual harassment, honour crimes, genital examination, etc. ( Yildirim.pg:10).

### Honour

"Honour" is a novel based on honour killings that still exist in some parts of in Turkish society. An honour killing or honour criminal may be defined as "the murder of a girl or woman by her family members due to their disapproval of her alleged sexual misbehavior, which they perceive as defying societal gender norms"(Boon 816). Although not directly associated with Islam, it is perceived as a practice that sustains patriarchy and male domination in society. It asserts the concept that female honour is an entity that needs to be protected to ensure the respectability of her family in society. To sustain power relations in society and to ensure female subservience, a system of "shame, scandal, and gossip" evolved over time (Awwad 45). As Awwad points out, "honour killings reflect the patriarchal and patrilineal orientation of .....society aimed at creating a system of social control designed to protect important familial power structures including reproductive power."(41). These crimes are often committed due to societal pressures and pressures from close relatives.

In the novel, Shafak narrates the story of a Kurdish family who migrated to London. It is a family that embodies "patriarchal and traditional codes" and the "values and habits" of the characters "are mainly fashioned in the family" (Khan 478). It is a novel that "presents the complicated, and sometimes contradictory, experiences of diasporic characters" (Pourgharib 56). The novel is an attempt to portray "how women and their dreams are sacrificed in the name of family honour" by society (Sethi 24). Ikram and Waheed think that the media in the West have always tried to portray honor killings as having a close association with Islam and Muslim countries; however, Shafak has made an effort to break away from the accusation by investigating other factors that propagate and sustain this evil practice. It is a work that also ponders the role of women in constructing and maintaining gender roles.

Twin sisters, Pembe and Jamila, are central characters of the novel, which highlights the differential treatment received by men and women due to the existence of varied codes of conduct and gender roles. Shafak takes us through the story of three generations of a Turkish-Kurdish family, in the process trying to ascertain the causes that lead to an honor killing of a mother (Pembe) by her teenage son (Iskander). For Naze, (Pembe and Jamila's mother), giving birth to a son, was her ultimate aim in life which she failed.

She considers herself inferior to other women in her society due to this and tries to instill the ideology of the inferior status of women, in her daughters too. Pembe moves to London after her marriage to Adem and Jamila stays back in the village serving as a midwife. Adem soon falls prey to gambling and adultery and abandons his family. Pembe is forced to find work to support her family and before long meets Elias with whom she discovers true love. Iskander, meanwhile, grows into a radical Muslim youth, who clings to his faith and traditions. Upon discovery of his mother's affair, he decides to take action as he considered himself to be the 'head' of the family to protect the family's honour. He murders her with no second thoughts as he considered that it was the right thing to do and is imprisoned.

As the central characters are in a foreign land, one witnesses the constant struggle they endure when they are confronted with an alien culture. Efforts to adhere to their traditional culture and beliefs are made by all the major characters. Even after years of staying in London, they do not have a sense of belonging and hold on to their native culture.

Efforts to instill accepted gendered behavior in her children is taken by Naze from a very early age. Naze considers her husband's efforts to educate her daughters as of "no use as they all get married before long" (Shafak, 14). She loudly voices her belief that married women are meant to endure their husbands and not disobey, protest, or abandon them no matter what. She also reminds her daughters that "modesty is a woman's only shield" (Shafak 15).

The importance given to honour by Turkish families is reflected in the newspaper article that reported the murder of Pembe which said: "The honour of the family is deemed to be more important than the happiness of its individuals" (Shafak,72). On several occasions in the novel, it is clearly stated that the responsibility of preserving the honour of the family lies with the woman. Women are often given the responsibility of maintaining the honour of the family while men remain the preservers. Shafak exposes how men and women receive differential treatment from society - women deviating from accepted codes of conduct of are thought of as bringing "shame" to family, while such acts from men are meant to be tolerated. In Shafak's own words, she has used the novel as a medium to focus on "how mothers raise their sons as the sultans in the house and how this ruins people's happiness in the long run" (Shafak in Guardian)

When Jamila is kidnapped, she is labeled "tainted" by society and her family immediately takes steps to preserve the honour of the family by arranging an alliance for her with an older relative of her kidnapper who had agreed to "save" her honour. (Shafak 97). Adem also abandons Jamila, whom he initially planned to marry after this incident for fear of marrying a tainted woman.

Although Pembe was the more ambitious one among the twins, she settles down into an unhappy marriage and even blames herself when she discovers that Adem is cheating on her.

"The entire novel bears testimony to the fact that women ultimately become the pallbearers of the family honour. Society's conservative and orthodox outlook allows men to indulge in wrongdoings but a woman who desires a few moments of innocent happiness is declared 'shameless' and is punished for her acts." (Sethi 25). Unfortunately, it is believed by some people that a shamed family can only regain their honour in society through bloodshed i.e. the killing of the culprit (in most cases women), an

act often committed by a father or brother figure in the family. Chastity, dressing properly, conducting oneself according to expectations, and knowing one's duties according to traditions are invariably expected from Turkish women.

The novel also discusses how women and men are conditioned from a very young age to fit varying gender roles. Women belonging to Turkish culture are depicted as controlled, dependent, lacking in ambition, timid, and mostly confined to their homes and household chores; their life revolves around their husbands and their families. Turkish men enjoy an elevated status with them being the decision maker, providers of the family, controllers of family members (especially women), and protectors.

Pembe, the victim herself, is seen instilling cultural and gendered norms in her children. While her son Iskander was treated as a 'sultan' and the head of the house in her husband's absence, she constantly advised her daughter to be demure, subdued, and docile. Pembe exhibits varied treatment towards her sons and her daughter. Even though she is the adult in the family in the absence of her husband, Pembe doesn't hesitate to transfer the title of "the head of the family" to Iskander who is still a child. Pembe gives special treatment to Iskander and encourages 'manly' traits. When he picks fights with other children he is not reprimanded but Pembe feels pride in his act which encourages him to become a bully as he grows up.

Shafak also contrasts the women of the West with traditional Turkish women through the characters of Roxana (Adem's lover) and Pembe. Roxana is portrayed as a fearless, independent woman who stands up to men and takes no orders from anyone. Jamila on the other hand is subdued, dependent and considers herself to be inferior to men.

While Iskander considers his mother's affair to have compromised his family's honour, his father abandoning his family for a lover doesn't seem to be a matter of concern. Immediate family members and friends encourage Iskander to control his mother, and never judge his father's acts. Even Pembe's act of securing a job to support her family is seen as something that simply "wasn't right" (Shafak 151). Adem's infidelity was also blamed to be Pembe's fault as "she was not woman enough to keep her husband home" (Shafak 153).

The importance of honour for Turkish men is highlighted through the words of Tariq (Adem's elder brother) who says "Honour was all that some men had in this world" (Shafak 153). He reminds Iskander of the role of women in upholding the honour of the family and the role of men in ensuring that women do not deviate. Families that were tainted suffered from social isolation and public humiliation that increased people's fear of undergoing such trauma. As Tariq notes:

*"You could not walk on the street anymore unless you got used to staring at the pavement. You could not go to the tea house or play a round of backgammon or watch a football match in the beer house. Your shoulders would droop, your fists would be clenched, your eyes would sink into their cavities and your entire being will be a listless mass, shrinking more and more with every rumor. No one would pay heed to what you spoke; your word would be no more valuable than dried dung. The cigarette you offered would be left unsmoked, the coffee you drank was bitter to the end. You*

*would not be invited to weddings, circumcisions, or engagements lest you bring ill luck with you. In your corner and surrounded by disgrace, you would dry up like a desiccated fruit."* (Shafak 154)

Esma, Pembe's daughter who experiences gender discrimination from her mother and brother, observes how children are tuned from a very young age to perform gender roles starting with the names given to them. The young girl struggles to comprehend the secondary role of women in society and why she deserves inferior treatment when compared to her brothers.

Iskander, even as a boy, feels the pressure of society and his family, to grow into a strong and brave man, especially in the absence of his father. He says "My father isn't around....I had to grow at top speed" (Shafak 225). He is seen dictating terms to his mother, forbidding her to leave their house, and wearing outfits that were not modest. When he finds out about his mother's affair, he is pressurized into upholding the family honour and told to put her in her place as the head of the family (Shafak 226). What is unique about Shafak's treatment of the theme of honour killing is the fact that she doesn't present the killing as an "evil act committed by Iskander"; rather Iskander is depicted as a "desperate migrant rather than an evil one" (Pourgharib 52).

Feminism is also viewed by the characters as a solution to problems of the women in the West as "Westerners have no family values and respect for women" and Turkish men "respect our mothers, sisters, and wives." (Shafak 216). Even while living in a city like London, the outlook of some of the characters like Meral (Tariq's wife), who was a perfect example of an 'ideal woman' is traditional and narrow-minded. She condemns the modern woman who is independent – financially and emotionally - as "fallen" as they were selfish and did not care for their families like she did (Shafak 230).

Murder was seen as the only solution to regain a family's lost honour. Often, immediate family members like fathers or brothers commit the crime or force the woman to commit suicide. Heide (Pembe and Jamila's sister), who had eloped and brought shame to the family, commits suicide upon receiving encouragement from their father.

The existence of dual moral codes of conduct for men and women is also exposed by Shafak throughout the novel. Adem abandoning his family for a lover or Iskander getting his girlfriend pregnant are not seen as matters that compromise the family's honour. Pembe's attempt to move on in life and seek happiness is viewed as a sin that she had to pay for with her life. This prejudiced treatment "displays the sexist duality of the honour concept" (Khan 478). Pembe herself feels guilty for falling in love and seeking happiness as she is portrayed as the preserver of patriarchal values. "Society is so conservative and orthodox that it allows men every right to indulge in wrongdoings but a woman who desires a few moments of innocent happiness is declared 'shameless' and is punished for her acts. Violence is perpetrated by men in his blood and she doesn't have the right to complain. Pembe's son Iskander calmly accepts his father's illicit affair but punishes the mother for her supposed affair. He even "justifies himself." (Sethi 25)

Shafak, through this novel, draws our attention towards the biased treatment received by women and men in Turkish society and how varied codes of conduct for either often prevent women from living

a happier and fuller life. They are burdened with pseudo-honour concepts which ensure their inferior status and reinforce the practice of patriarchy.

### The Forty Rules of Love

The novel narrates two parallel stories spread across two different cultures and times. The central character is Ella Rubenstein, an ordinary homemaker with two kids and an unfaithful husband. Her life revolves around her family and the daily chores of her household. However, her commitment and efforts are the least valued. Ella is a representative of women who constantly toils day after day for their family yet remains invisible and unappreciated. She struggles to keep her family happy and satisfied, often at the cost of her happiness. Her outlook towards life changes when she takes up an assignment to review the book "Sweet Blasphemy" based on 13<sup>th</sup>-century poet Rumi and his teacher Shams of Tabriz. Slowly she falls in love with the author of the work Aziz, which makes her question the life into which she has settled- a life devoid of love, passion, and self-respect. Like Rumi, she breaks the conventions of society and escapes from the safety and security of her life. She steps out from the marriage which had become a burden to her by abandoning her family. She decides to live with Aziz although he could not offer her long-lasting happiness. Shafak used the novel as a medium to highlight "the relevance of medieval philosophy and values in the present times" (Firdous 559). The novel also provides "counter-narratives to foreground the spiritual dimension of Islam and thereby insisting on a deeply feminist paradigm of this religion." (Shah 284)

Shafak explores the transformation which happens in the life of Ella, a Jewish American housewife, through the influence of Sufism. Her job as the reviewer of "Sweet Blasphemy" makes her realize the lack of love in her life. The lack of purpose and meaning in her life forces her to make a bold move i.e. to abandon her family and choose a live a life with her terminally ill lover. Ella's metamorphosis is recorded as a quest for knowledge and self-discovery; a knowledge which she gains through "illumination, revelation and inspiration" (Firdous 558).

Ella is a traditional housewife in many ways. She reduces her role in her family to that of a devout mother and wife. She is continually guilty and unsatisfied about her role as a mother and wife and strives for perfection which unfortunately goes unappreciated and unnoticed by her husband and children. In the prologue, Shafak compares Ella's life to "still water" which was "predictable" and "monotonous" (2). She is a representative of many women around the globe who cannot imagine a world beyond their family and the boundaries of their home; they remain unappreciated, unloved, and invisible. As Shafak comments :

"I know many women like Ella. Not only in the West but there are also a lot more women like that in Turkey..... When you lift these apparent differences, you realize that the stories beneath are similar and global. We can build empathy with each other through these similarities. Many people are imprisoned in an unhappy marriage and they don't make any effort to find a way out or to transform themselves and just live their lives the way they are." (Under the Spell of Divine and Human Love: Taking a Long Journey into Yourself).

Her dependence on her family led to her lacking "survival techniques to help her cope with life's hardship on her own" (Shafak 3). Ella can also be considered a representative of women who forgets to create an identity of their own and seek their own happiness. Malik notes "Being the mother, the wife, the dog walker, and the housekeeper, keeps Ella from achieving her aspiration" (12). Even her husband's infidelity fails to jerk her out of this state. "Ella is aware of her husband's mistresses, but finding no way out, she has become compromised to her life" (Firdous 560). The lack of love in her married life makes her lose faith in the concept which she confesses to her daughter thus- "... which century are you living in? Just get it in your head, women do not marry the men they fall in love with. They choose a guy who will be a good father and reliable husband. Love is only a sweet feeling bound to come and quickly go away." (Shafak 14). Her marriage is namesake with little love remaining between the husband and wife as Ella describes: "Twenty years of marriage, twenty years of sleeping in the same bed, sharing a same shower, eating the same food, raising three kids-and what it all added up to was silence" (Shafak 239). Minor characters like Kimya, and Kerra are also "perfect examples of gifted women whose creativity was repressed by the dominated creeds of the patriarchal society." (Malik 1213). Despite being talented Kimya is refused education and opportunities to nurture her talents reinforcing the opinion that women are meant to be in their homes caring for their children and husband and attending to their needs.

Her children having grown up and no longer need her, encourages her to take up a job as a literary agent through which she encounters the work "Sweet Blasphemy" which radically turns around her life. The Turkish author, Aziz, narrates the story of the deep friendship between the celebrated thirteenth-century poet Rumi and his spiritual guide Shams of Tabriz. Rumi, hitherto a religious orator, realizes his true calling - a visionary poet after he meets Shams who reveals to him the forty rules of love. The layers of love revealed to Ella through the novel shake her to the core and transform her from a non-believer to a romantic who sheds her inhibitions, insecurities, and priorities to seek a new life filled with happiness, satisfaction, and love. She realizes - "For despite what some people say, love is not only a sweet feeling bound to come and quickly go away." (Shafak 17). Never in her wildest of dreams did she imagine that she would deeply resonate with the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Sufism / the wisdom of love discussed in the novel which she was to merely review. "These forty rules of love inspired Ella and she conceived that her life would be rewritten. "These rules were injecting a new flavor of love into her veins. She becomes the incarnation of love at the end of the novel. " (Firdous 564). Before meeting Aziz, Ella was not the kind of woman who would "throw caution to the wind" (Shafak 3). Yet, we see her abandoning her family and ending her twenty years of marriage for something she had earlier lost faith in - love.

Her job as the literary agent allows her to correspond with the author Aziz and they are drawn to each other immediately. "Exchanging e-mails with Aziz made Ella feel that she was somehow breaking away from her staid and tranquil life. From a woman with lots of dull grays and browns in her life's canvas, she was turning into a woman with a secret colour- a bright, tantalizing red. And she loved it. (Shafak 95)

The two stories (Rumi's and Ella's), run parallel and similar to each other. As Firdous notes:

"By forcing Rumi to step outside the confines of learning, he encouraged the poet to experience life as it is, raw and untamed, a rich ferment of desire and anguish needing to be consumed by the purifying fires of love. Similarly, Aziz, through his e-mails, puts the raw and untamed love of Ella into the ferment of love. The relationship proves to be fulfilling for both. While Ella has been looking for a man who could receive and imbibe her emotional setup, Aziz too is lucky to find a woman whom he could shake, destroy, build, regenerate and elevate" (565)

Although the major theme of the novel is the platonic nature of love which transcends time and boundaries of all kinds, Shafak also discusses gender justice in the work. As Shah notes "Shafak rejects both Western feminism and Islamic orthodoxy and strives for gender justice within an Islamic framework, advocating a re-reading of the Quran, a reinterpretation of Quran." (Pg: 285). As Shafak says "Those who like to swim close to the surface are content with the outer meaning of the Quran. Many people are like that. They take the verses too literally. No wonder when they read a verse like the Nisa, they arrive at a conclusion that men are held superior to women. Because that is exactly what they want to see." (Shafak, 2010:197). Shah feels that the novel has been used by Shafak as a platform to reveal "a deeply feministic paradigm" of Islam (Pg:284). Shams highlight the need for embracing masculinity and femininity as each of us has "both femininity and masculinity in varying degrees and shades." (pg:198).

In the chapter titled Kimya, Shafak discusses her thoughts on gender through the conversation between Shams and Kimya. Kimya questions Shams whether Islam really advocates the infamous wife beating and the superiority of men. In reply, Shams reveals that the Quran is open to interpretation depending on the state of mind of its reader. He compares Quran to a shy bride who shall only open her veil "if she sees that the onlooker is soft and compassionate at heart" (Shafak 196). The verses in Quran may have been wrongly interpreted and used for the inferior status, subjugation and of women in society for centuries. Shafak puts forth this opinion through the character of Shams who exemplifies this through two interpretations of the same verse from Al Nisa on how wives should be treated by husbands. While the first one advocates subjugation and violence, the second version contrasts by promoting the need for compassion and understanding. Shah opines that Shafak uses the novel to counter the dominant view of a religion that victimizes women; "In fact, Forty Rules of Love represents Muslim women who have a deep relationship with their religion and are empowered by it, suggesting that the sacred space which Islam can create might well be a place to take refuge in rather than escape from." (Shah 288). When Kimya points out to Shams that society would judge her for not consummating their marriage, Shams is aggravated by the pseudo-codes of honour imposed on individuals by society sometimes even in the name of God. He says: "It made my blood boil that society imposed such ridiculous rules on its individuals. These codes of honour had less to do with the harmony God created than with the order human beings wanted to sustain. People should mind their own business" (Shafak, 2001, pg:307).

As Gilbert and Gubar highlight, Kerra is also a character in the novel who experiences the repressions of society in the name of being a woman (402). She echoes the restrictions imposed on women thus -"When you are born a girl, you are taught how to cook and clean, wash dirty dishes, mend old stocks, make butter and cheese, and feed babies. Some women are also taught the art of love and making themselves attractive to men. (Malik 1214)

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, Shafak through the novels, tries to reflect on the unjust treatment received by women in Turkish society or any other patriarchal society. Patriarchy and assumed gender roles often silence and subjugate women, not allowing them to live life on their own terms and compromising their happiness for the sake of family or society. Pembe and Ella are both victims of such codes of conduct. They are representatives of thousands of women across the globe who silently live and die unhappy, unloved, and unappreciated. Ella, unlike, Pembe shows much more courage than Pembe to liberate herself from the chains that prevented her from living a fuller life. She begins a new life as an independent woman with no remorse for seeking her own happiness. The struggles of Turkish women identify with those faced by women living in other patriarchal societies. Shafak, who has always spoken for the marginalized and silenced, emphasizes the fact that even in the modern era of civilized societies there is a need for redefining gender roles based on individual happiness and norms of equality.

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