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Portraying Son Preference Through Family Dynamics in Elif Shafak's *Honour*

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Abstract. This study examines the representation of son preference in Elif Shafak's novel *Honour* (2012), which traces three generations of a Turkish immigrant family across rural Turkey and London. "Son preference the systematic cultural valuing of sons over daughters remains deeply entrenched in Turkish and Kurdish patriarchal structures". The study addresses two research questions: how Shafak depicts son preference in the novel, and how son preference influences the experiences of female characters. A qualitative literary approach is applied through close reading of narratives, characters, and family dynamics, guided by two theoretical frameworks: Amartya Sen's (1990) son preference theory, which identifies the structural and cultural dimensions within which son preference operates, and Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of the patriarchal bargain, which explains how women navigate and reproduce patriarchal systems across generations. The findings reveal that Shafak depicts son preference through three interrelated dimensions of family life: parental behavior and reproductive choices, naming and symbolic treatment of children, and gender inequality in everyday family settings. Son preference affects the four main female characters in distinct ways: Naze accepts the patriarchal bargain completely at the cost of her life, Pembe perpetuates it while suffering under it, Esma recognizes inequality without being able to escape it, and Jamila rejects it but pays a genuine personal price. Together, these positions confirm that son preference in the novel operates not through external forces but from within the relationships that are supposed to protect women.

Keywords: *gender, inequality, patriarchal bargain, son preference*

1. INTRODUCTION

Son preference the systematic valuing of sons over daughters in family structures has been identified by Amartya Sen (1990) as a socioeconomic pattern with measurable demographic consequences, particularly observable in contexts such as Turkey where patriarchal family

structures shape reproductive decisions and resource distribution. This preference remains prevalent in Turkish society and is frequently linked to cultural norms, economic goals, family honour, and the perpetuation of the male line of descent (Ezdi & Baş, 2020). In this context, sons are often seen as the bearers of family identity and social value, whereas daughters are considered less important (Kazenin, 2024). This belief is often embedded in family practices and in everyday life, even where social and legal modernization has taken place (Ezdi & Baş, 2020). This preference persists even when Turkish families migrate to Western countries, continuing to shape family values and reproductive decisions within the diasporic household (Ezdi & Baş, 2020).

Within family and gender relations, son preference has a direct impact on the position of female children (Sen, 1990). In the family, girls may receive unequal attention, expectations, and emotional value. Sons are positioned at the heart of hope and authority; daughters are expected to adapt, comply, and accept secondary roles. These practices contribute to the construction of female identity over time, and girls learn to embody the norms of obedience, sacrifice, and silence. Such values are passed on through parenting and cultural norms, making son preference normal and self-perpetuating across generations (Kandiyoti, 1988). The preference for sons is not just manifested in overt discrimination but also in subtle, everyday decisions, emotional investment, and moral expectations (Javed & Mughal, 2019).

Literature offers a valuable context for exploring such social realities through narrative and character construction. Elif Shafak's *Honour* (2012), a novel tracing the Toprak family across three generations between Turkey and London, presents a sustained literary portrayal of son preference as it operates within family relationships, making it a productive site for examining how this dynamic is constructed and reproduced through narrative. There have been a number of studies on this novel from different angles. The oppression of Kurdish women was analysed by Octania (2023) using Kate Millet's radical feminist theory; a feminist perspective on women's oppression was employed by Handayani and Nurhidayat (2024); and gender roles in Turkish society were examined by Zacharia and Senthamarai (2023). The current research builds on these investigations by specifically exploring son preference as a distinct cultural mechanism and its impact on the portrayal of family dynamics and the lived experience of female characters.

This study therefore focuses on son preference as the main subject of analysis, examining this phenomenon in literary text to gain insight into the construction and maintenance of gender inequality in everyday family life as depicted in *Honour*. Two research questions guide the investigation: first, how does Elif Shafak portray son preference in *Honour*? Second, what impacts does son preference have on the experiences of female characters in Elif Shafak's *Honour*?

2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design grounded in feminist literary analysis. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research aims to interpret meanings embedded within a literary text rather than measure variables statistically (Creswell, 2014). Since son preference is examined as a culturally embedded narrative practice, the study relies on close reading to identify patterns of gendered value systems, ideological assumptions, and culturally recognized norms (Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

The primary data source is Elif Shafak's *Honour* (2012). The data consist of narrative descriptions, dialogues, and events relevant to the representation of son preference, family relationships, and the experiences of female characters. Secondary data sources include theoretical and critical materials related to son preference, gender studies, and qualitative literary analysis, as well as previous scholarly studies on *Honour* focusing on gender discrimination.

Two theoretical frameworks guide the analysis. Amartya Sen's (1990) son preference theory serves as the main analytical lens, identifying the structural and cultural dimensions through which son preference operates in the novel. Sen's theory is organized around six analytical dimensions: natality, basic facilities, special opportunities, the household dimension, social construction, and

the self-reinforcing mechanism. Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of the patriarchal bargain serves as a supporting framework, explaining how women respond to and sustain patriarchal systems through strategies shaped by the social order around them including son investment strategy, intergenerational transmission, classic patriarchy mechanism, and the disrupted bargain.

Data collection follows a structured sequence: reading *Honour* thoroughly for familiarization; identifying and highlighting passages relevant to son preference, family expectations, and gender roles; selecting textual evidence that reflects unequal valuation of sons and daughters; and organizing selected data into thematic categories. Data analysis proceeds by sorting gathered data into themes corresponding to the two research questions, analyzing selected passages using the theoretical frameworks, interpreting each theme through characters and family dynamics, and connecting results with the research questions to produce conclusions (Maxwell, 2012).

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3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following analysis addresses two central questions: (1) how son preference is portrayed through parental behavior, naming practices, and gender inequality in family life in Shafak's *Honour*; and (2) how son preference impacts the identity, relationships, and experiences of the novel's female characters across three generations.

3.1 The Portrayal of Son Preference in *Honour*

Within the Toprak family as depicted in Shafak's *Honour*, the differential valuation of sons over daughters is established from birth through a pattern that Sen (1990) identifies as son preference visible in the way parental expectations, naming practices, and early family interactions are rendered differently depending on a child's gender. Son preference has a close relationship with family expectations, parenting styles, and social identity in Kurdish societies, in terms of family honour and lineage. Son preference is therefore not just a wish; it is a cultural system that affects the definition and transmission of gender and family value from one generation to the next.

3.1.1 Parental Behavior and Reproductive Choice

In *Honour*, Shafak portrays Naze's reproductive decisions as fundamentally shaped by the social pressure to produce a male heir a pressure that Sen (1990) identifies as son preference, one that transforms the desire for a son from an individual wish into a structurally enforced expectation within the patriarchal family. Sons are frequently viewed as the individuals who continue the family lineage, provide support for parents in old age, and contribute to the family's social standing (Sen, 1990). This expectation places considerable pressure on women, who are often held responsible for the gender of their children despite having no biological control over it (D'Lima, Solotaroff, & Pande, 2020).

The portrayal of son preference through parental behavior begins with Naze, the grandmother figure whose entire reproductive life is defined by the cultural expectation of producing a male heir. Although Naze gives birth to eight daughters and experiences five miscarriages, she refuses to accept this outcome and continues to believe that a son will eventually come. She understands her worth as a mother entirely through this unfulfilled expectation, preparing for the son she is certain will arrive by knitting blue blankets and constructing in her imagination a future centred on a male heir: *"Naze had had one more full-term pregnancy after Pink Destiny and Enough Beauty. It had to be a boy this time there was no other possibility. Allah owed her this; He was in her debt, she said, even though she knew she was speaking utter blasphemy"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 21).

Applying Sen's (1990) social construction dimension, Naze's behavior reflects a cultural system that teaches women to measure their social value and maternal worth through the production of sons. Her daughters cannot satisfy the expectation embedded in this system because only a son is understood to carry the family name forward and secure the recognition that the cultural order

reserves for mothers of male heirs. This shows that Naze's conviction is not personal irrationality but a response to a structural inequality that defines a woman's success in reproduction entirely through the gender of the child she produces.

The most extreme portrayal of son preference through parental behavior is Naze's final pregnancy, which Shafak presents as the moment where cultural pressure for a son becomes literally fatal. At forty-nine years old, Naze becomes pregnant once more and refuses all medical warnings that the birth poses serious danger to her life. When labor becomes a crisis and the midwife attempts to save the mother rather than deliver the child, Naze overrides her entirely, demanding to be cut open to deliver what she is certain is a son: *"At that moment Naze, lying there with her eyes clamped shut, dancing with death, bleeding umbrage, lifted her head and yelled: 'No, you whore!' It was a cry so shrill and forceful, it didn't sound as if it had come out of a human being"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 22). Naze does not survive, and the child she dies to deliver is another daughter. Applying Sen's (1990) natality dimension, Naze's decision demonstrates how son preference distorts the most fundamental reproductive choices a woman makes.

The wider community's response to daughters further reinforces this structural norm. When Naze gives birth to twin daughters, she enters forty days of public silence as a theological protest. The first twin's birth is described: *"When Pembe was born, Naze was so sad she forgot about all she had suffered for the previous twenty-six hours, the blood oozing between her legs, and tried to get up and walk away"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 11). Three village elders visit her house to intervene not to challenge her grief but to regulate its expression, confirming that son preference is endorsed and reinforced at the community level.

Finally, the cultural logic of son preference travels forward into the next generation through Pembe's extraordinary protective treatment of Iskender before he is even formally named. Pembe refuses to give her son a name as a way of protecting him from Azrael, the Angel of Death, believing that an unnamed child cannot be claimed: *"Such was Pembe's unease that she refused to give her son a name… If the baby had no particular affiliation, she thought, Azrael would not be able to find him, even if he wished to"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 24). This spiritual protection never extended to any daughter in the novel illustrates how son preference influences parental choices across generations.

3.1.2 Naming and Symbolic Treatment of Children

In *Honour*, the names Shafak assigns to her characters are not arbitrary but function as narrative devices that encode the family's differential valuation of sons and daughters from birth. Sons receive names that carry connotations of power and legacy, while daughters are given names that reflect resignation, loss, or diminished expectation.

The portrayal of son preference through naming begins with the moment Naze gives names to her twin daughters after forty days of silence. Rather than choosing names that celebrate or welcome her daughters, Naze selects names that function as a public declaration of exhaustion and an ultimatum addressed to God: *"Bext and Bese in Kurdish, Kader and Yeter in Turkish, Destiny and Enough in every language possible"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 13). Applying Sen's (1990) social construction dimension, Naze's naming choice demonstrates how cultural expectations shape the way daughters are perceived even before they develop their own identities.

Berzo's replacement names introduce a different form of symbolic construction that still operates within the same logic of son preference. While Naze's names express open disappointment, Berzo's replacement names assign the daughters identities based on softness and beauty rather than ability, authority, or achievement: *"'Better stick to ordinary names and stay on the safe side.' Thus saying, he announced that he had alternatives in mind: Pembe and Jamila Pink and Beautiful. Names like sugar cubes that melted in your tea, sweet and yielding, with no sharp edges"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 13). As this analysis shows, son preference is conveyed not only through overt disappointment at daughters but also symbolically, in ways that restrict the imagination of female identity from birth.

Both sets of names survive as compound identities Pembe Kader (Pink Destiny) and Jamila Yeter (Enough Beauty) which together signify resignation and ornamentation as the values of female existence within the cultural system.

The sharpest contrast in naming appears in Iskender's treatment. Unlike the daughters, whose names are chosen in resignation or offered as decorative substitutes, Iskender's naming becomes an elaborate ceremonial event marked by protection, anticipation, and the offering of two powerful masculine identities: *"Yes, I have. There are two names that might suit him well, depending on what you expect. One is Saalim… The other is Iskender a commander who fought like a tiger, won all his battles, and yet was still hungry for more"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 25). Pembe chooses Iskender without hesitation.

Esma, as the novel's narrator, further reinforces the symbolic dimension of son preference by articulating how gendered meanings are embedded in names across the culture: *"I often wondered why female names were so different from male names, more whimsical and dreamlike, as if women were unreal, a figment of one's imagination. Male names embodied power, ability and authority… Female names, however, reflected a delicate daintiness… women were decorations for this world, pretty trimmings on the side, but not too essential"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 163). This passage demonstrates that son preference is sustained through shared cultural meanings that assign authority and importance to masculinity while associating femininity with passivity and decoration and that these symbolic systems survive both migration and generational distance.

Shafak further strengthens the symbolic dimension by linking the name Iskender directly to the character's eventual violence against Pembe. The name assigned at birth with its connotations of conquest and dominance becomes the identity through which Iskender ultimately restricts his mother's freedom and kills her in the name of honour. This reveals that naming practices in *Honour* are not merely reflective of son preference but actively create the conditions for its most harmful consequences.

3.1.3 Gender Inequality in Family Life

Son preference produces gender inequality in everyday family life through decisions that rarely appear as injustice but function as common sense within the cultural system who receives an education, who has space and freedom in the family, who is expected to obey, and who expects to be obeyed. These everyday inequalities are often more durable than spectacular acts of discrimination because they are embedded in routine.

The portrayal of gender inequality in family life begins with the dismissal of daughters' education, one of the most consequential expressions of son preference. Naze considers her daughters' schooling a waste: *"Meanwhile, their mother, Naze, didn't see the point in their going to such lengths to master words and numbers that would be of no use, since they would all get married before long"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 15). Applying Sen's (1990) basic facilities dimension, daughters in the cultural system Shafak portrays are consistently denied the educational investment that would allow them to develop independent capacity and imagine a life beyond the roles assigned to them.

Shafak portrays the different moral worth assigned to sons and daughters through the metaphor of fabric: *"It was all because women were made of the lightest cambric, Naze continued, whereas men were cut of thick, dark fabric. That is how God had tailored the two: one superior to the other"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 19). Applying Sen's (1990) social construction dimension, this metaphor demonstrates how son preference operates through the symbolic meanings a culture attaches to bodies and gender presenting the structural inequality between sons and daughters as a natural and unchangeable fact.

The structural inequality produced by son preference does not remain confined to Naze's generation but travels forward through the self-reinforcing mechanism of intergenerational transmission. Shafak makes this explicit in one of the novel's most precise narrative statements: *"It would be one of the many ironies of Pembe's life that the things she hated to hear from Naze she would repeat to her daughter, Esma, word for word, years later, in England"* (Shafak, 2012, p.

20). Pembe, having been raised to believe that education and independent aspiration are wasted on daughters who will marry, raises her own daughter with the same belief ensuring that the structural inequality is reproduced without any external enforcement and without conscious recognition of what is being passed on.

In addition to education, Shafak portrays son preference through the unequal allocation of domestic space. Iskender has his own room and complete freedom within it, while Esma is refused the same provision when she requests it, on cultural grounds: *"You're not an English girl"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 160). Using Sen's (1990) household dimension, the unequal distribution of domestic space mirrors and perpetuates the gendered hierarchy of values that son preference produces even in London, far from the Kurdish village where Naze was born.

Shafak further deepens the portrayal of gender inequality by showing how Pembe's relationship with Esma changes fundamentally once Esma reaches puberty. Whatever broader maternal attention existed before is replaced by a singular preoccupation with the monitoring of Esma's sexual purity: *"We had been very close, me and my mother, but all that changed the moment my breasts started to bud and I had my first period. The only thing she was interested in now was my virginity"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 164). Where sons are raised with expanding expectations about who they can become, daughters are raised under an increasingly narrowing focus on what they must not become.

Beyond this, Shafak demonstrates that son preference persists even in the novel's most sympathetic male character. Berzo insists on educating his daughters and demonstrates greater emotional warmth than Naze, yet it *"saddened him profoundly not to have a son to carry his name to the ends of the earth"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 14). Even the most generous male character in the novel is not entirely free from the cultural norm of the son as essential to family continuity. Together, these dimensions confirm that gender inequality in *Honour* is not the product of individual cruelty but of a cultural system that consistently favours sons over daughters across every domain of domestic and symbolic life.

3.2 The Impacts of Son Preference on Female Characters

The impact of son preference on women in Turkish and Kurdish patriarchal structures extends far beyond the unequal treatment of individual daughters. When a cultural system consistently assigns greater worth to sons than to daughters, that hierarchy gradually shapes how women understand their own value, what choices they believe are open to them, and how they relate to the sons and daughters they raise. Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of the patriarchal bargain explains why son preference is so durable across time and place: it does not only oppress women from the outside, it recruits women from the inside, making them the most faithful carriers of the very system that limits their lives.

3.2.1 Female Identity and Position

The most complete portrayal of son preference's impact on female identity in *Honour* is found in the character of Naze, who represents the patriarchal bargain accepted so completely that it finally demands her life. Naze has given birth to eight daughters and suffered five miscarriages, yet she understands her worth entirely in terms of whether she can fulfil one cultural demand: the production of a male heir. She overrides the midwife and demands to be cut open in order to deliver what she is certain is a son and does not survive. The child she sacrifices herself for is another daughter. Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) classic patriarchy mechanism, Naze's death represents the patriarchal bargain taken to its most extreme conclusion: she internalizes the belief that producing a son will grant her legitimacy and worth within the cultural order, and she surrenders her life in pursuit of that promise. Shafak portrays Naze not as a foolish woman who made a fatal choice but as the most complete evidence of what son preference actually costs women.

Shafak portrays the most consequential impact of son preference through Pembe, the novel's most effective perpetuator of the cultural system. Although she grows up as an unwanted daughter her birth provoking her mother's forty days of silence, her name chosen in resignation Pembe does

not break the cycle when she becomes a mother herself. Instead, she reproduces it with greater intensity, treating Iskender as the heir her mother never had and investing in him the devotion she herself was never given. At seventeen, nursing her newborn son, she imagines her dead mother watching from heaven with envy: *"Here she was, only seventeen and already breastfeeding a son. She couldn't help suspecting that from somewhere in the heavens, under a watery light, her mother was watching her with envy"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 23). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) son investment strategy, Pembe's treatment of Iskender is not simply an expression of love but a structural act: within the only value system she has ever known, investing in a son is the most rational path to security, status, and a sense of achievement.

Shafak portrays a third form of son preference's impact through Esma, the novel's narrator, who represents the experience of awareness without freedom. Unlike Naze and Pembe, Esma can see the inequality she lives inside. She knows that Iskender has a room while she does not, that her mother restricts her in ways that her brother is never restricted, and that the cultural expectations placed on her as a girl bear no resemblance to those placed on her brother as a boy: *"Most of the girls I knew had their own bedrooms and could keep their doors closed as they pleased. Not me"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 160). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) classic patriarchy mechanism, Esma's situation illustrates the limit of individual consciousness within structural constraint: awareness of the bargain does not automatically produce the ability to escape it.

Beyond this, Shafak completes the portrayal of son preference's impact on female identity through Jamila, who represents the most direct refusal of the patriarchal bargain available to any female character in the novel. Jamila never marries, works as a midwife, and repeatedly urges Pembe to leave Adem and claim her own life. However, Shafak is careful not to present this refusal as simple liberation. Jamila lost the man she loved because a false accusation about her honour caused Adem to choose Pembe instead, and she came close to ending her life twice as a result: *"Twice in her life she had come close to killing herself: after being brought back to her father by her kidnappers, still a virgin but for ever tainted; and on the day she learned Adem had asked for Pembe's hand"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 158). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) disrupted bargain mechanism, Jamila's story demonstrates that the patriarchal bargain is not simply a choice women can refuse without cost. Exiting the bargain means accepting exclusion from the social structures that provide security, love, and belonging within the cultural system the novel depicts.

Taken together, these four positions confirm that son preference in *Honour* shapes female identity not through one uniform experience but through four distinct positions: consumed by the bargain completely like Naze, perpetuating it while having suffered under it like Pembe, resisting it while remaining inside its material constraints like Esma, or refusing it entirely and paying the price like Jamila. As Kandiyoti (1988) argues, the impact of son preference on female identity is total in its reach, even when it is partial in its grip.

3.2.2 Mother-Child Relationship and Intergenerational Transmission

Son preference does not only shape how daughters are treated as individuals; it fundamentally restructures the mother-child relationship as the site through which cultural inequality is transmitted from one generation to the next. The most complete portrayal of this restructured relationship is found in Pembe's treatment of Iskender from the very moment of his birth. Even before he receives a formal name, Pembe addresses him with terms that encode absolute elevation *"Hush, my lion. This nice lady here is going to give you a name"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 25) and chooses the name that evokes a great conqueror.

Throughout Iskender's childhood, Pembe continues to reinforce this elevated identity through her daily language, consistently addressing him as *"my sultan"* even in unremarkable moments. Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) son investment strategy, each repetition of these titles is a structural act through which Pembe actively builds a masculine identity centred on authority, supremacy, and the right to be served and protected. The novel's epigraph *"As long as he can remember he has had a sense of himself as prince of the house, and of his mother as his dubious promoter and anxious protector"* (Shafak, 2012, epigraph) frames the entire novel through the lens of this relational

inequality, signalling that Iskender's entitlement is a product of the mother-son relationship as son preference has constructed it.

In sharp contrast, Pembe's relationship with Esma is defined by restriction and the consistent refusal to recognise her daughter's needs as legitimate. When Esma names the inequality directly *"'Mum, this is not fair. Iskender has his own room and he's only a year older than me. Why do you give such privileges to him just because he's a boy? You do this all the time'"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 245) Pembe shuts the conversation down rather than engage with it. Applying Sen's (1990) household dimension, Pembe's refusal confirms the inequality as natural and beyond question. Esma's further observation that her mother is *"always distracted"* and interested only in prohibitions toward her daughter captures how the emotional attention structured by son preference leaves daughters experiencing not absence of love but a form of attention entirely shaped by cultural control.

Shafak deepens this portrayal through Esma's reflection on how the mother-daughter relationship narrows entirely after puberty to the surveillance of sexual purity: *"We had been very close, me and my mother, but all that changed the moment my breasts started to bud and I had my first period. The only thing she was interested in now was my virginity"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 164). The same system that instructs Pembe to invest in Iskender's authority now instructs her to invest in Esma's constraint: the mother who built her son's identity around conquest and dominance rebuilds her daughter's identity around prohibition and surveillance.

The most devastating consequence of the mother-son relationship shaped by son preference is revealed when Iskender's authority built through years of Pembe's unconditional investment is turned against her. When Adem abandons the family, Iskender begins to restrict Pembe's movements, forbid her from continuing to work, and position himself as the enforcer of her honour. Pembe does not resist, continuing to call him her beloved and attributing his controlling behaviour to personal reasons rather than to the system of male entitlement she herself constructed: *"Iskender was her beloved, a bit angry at times, a bit emotional, but a good lad"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 200). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) intergenerational transmission mechanism, the authority the mother invests in the son eventually transfers from an external social expectation to the domestic space itself, making her subject to the very hierarchy she reinforced through years of differential love.

3.2.3 Family Relationships

Son preference restructures not only individual identities but the entire network of relationships within the family between parents and children, between siblings, and between generations. The impact of son preference on family relationships is most directly visible in the daily inequality between Iskender and Esma as siblings. Iskender has his own room, his own privacy, and the freedom to come and go without question. When Adem abandons the family, Iskender assumes authority over both Pembe and Esma. Esma resists this directly: *"'Who says you have to keep an eye on me? I can take care of myself, thank you very much'"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 191). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) classic patriarchy mechanism, this exchange demonstrates how the gendered hierarchy of the household flows into the sibling relationship, granting the older brother an authority over his sister that has no equivalent in reverse.

The impact of son preference on sibling relationships extends to the youngest child, Yunus, who despite being the most open-minded of the three children still absorbs the language of female shame when he discovers that Pembe has been seen with another man, calling her *"stained"* before immediately regretting the word and cupping his mouth in horror (Shafak, 2012, p. 245). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargain, this evidence shows that the gendered vocabulary of honour and shame does not require conscious instruction to transmit itself between siblings: Yunus has absorbed this language simply by growing up inside a domestic arrangement organized around the greater worth of sons.

The impact of son preference on family relationships extends into the marriage relationship, where Shafak portrays the double standard of the patriarchal bargain with particular clarity. Adem abandons his family, gambles away their wages, and takes a mistress, yet faces no consequence

within the community's honour framework. When Pembe begins an innocent emotional relationship with a man named Elias after years of abandonment, she is killed by her own son for it. Adem's brother Tariq responds to the abandonment not by holding Adem accountable but by blaming Pembe: *"'Well, what do you expect, if she's not woman enough to keep her husband home'"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 138). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) disrupted bargain mechanism, this contrast reveals that when the structural conditions that were supposed to make the bargain work collapse, the most dangerous dimensions of the system intensify rather than dissolve, transferring the enforcement of female compliance from husband to son.

Shafak further illustrates the effect of son preference on family relations through migration itself, demonstrating how the cultural system has been fully internalised into the family's functioning. London provides Pembe with opportunities unavailable in the Kurdish village economic independence, access to work, a legal framework that does not condone honour violence yet none of these options free her from the bargain. Adem leaves without social consequence because the community structure that would enforce his obligations is missing in London. But the sense of masculine entitlement that Pembe built through years of unconditional investment in Iskender is fully present. Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) disrupted bargain mechanism, migration intensifies rather than dissolves the effects of the patriarchal bargain: the parts of the system responsible for controlling women remain intact through internalisation, while the parts responsible for constraining men dissolve with geographic distance.

The most powerful representation of son preference's consequences on family relations is the intergenerational chain that carries it from Naze to Pembe to Iskender across three generations and two countries. This chain reaches its logical conclusion when the community, through anonymous notes placed in Iskender's pocket, triggers Iskender's violence against Pembe: *"Mother lies, Mother deceives, / She is not who she says she is"* (Shafak, 2012, p. 246). Applying Kandiyoti's (1988) intergenerational transmission mechanism, this chain represents how son preference turns the family itself into the delivery system for its own reproduction requiring no external force because the transmission happens through the bonds of love and care that connect parents to children across generations.

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4. CONCLUSION

From the analysis conducted in this study, two central findings emerge concerning son preference in Elif Shafak's *Honour*.

The first finding concerns how son preference is portrayed within the Toprak family. Son preference in *Honour* is depicted as a self-organizing pattern that structures the Toprak family's relationships from the very beginning of each character's life. It operates through naming practices, parental expectations, and the consistently unequal emotional investment placed in sons over daughters, using Sen's (1990) dimensions of natality, social construction, basic facilities, household dimension, and self-reinforcing mechanism. Sons are associated with heritage, continuity, and family standing, while daughters occupy a diminished position from birth. The most concentrated expression of this portrayal is found in Iskender's name itself, which the novel constructs as a script for masculine entitlement his act of violence against Pembe is not presented as an isolated breakdown but as the fulfillment of a cultural expectation built across generations.

The second finding concerns the effects of son preference on the novel's female characters. Son preference shapes the female characters' self-perception and the choices available to them in lasting and often irreversible ways, as analysed through Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargain and its associated mechanisms. Pembe, raised in an environment where daughters are experienced as disappointments, internalizes this devaluation and reproduces it most visibly in her relationship with Iskender, investing in her son the worth she was denied as a daughter in a way that ultimately costs her life. Esma and Jamila's experiences further illustrate how the same structure limits female

autonomy across different positions within the family, even as the family moves from rural Turkey to London.

The ending of the novel reinforces both findings without offering resolution. Iskender serves a prison sentence for killing Pembe; Esma continues living, carrying the family's grief and memory forward. The novel closes not with healing but with a reckoning, suggesting that the cost of son preference is borne most heavily by those who sustained it, and that its consequences outlast the acts it produces.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that *Honour* portrays son preference as a self-reinforcing pattern that persists through the very relationships it disadvantages. The novel offers readers a way of understanding how unequal value placed on sons over daughters is not simply inherited from the past but actively reproduced within family life and at what cost to the women who carry it forward. Through the stories of Naze, Pembe, Esma, and Jamila, *Honour* ultimately presents son preference not as a matter of individual belief but as a structure maintained through the most intimate acts of love, naming, and parenting that define family life across generations.

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