


 Journal homepage: <https://jll.uoch.edu.pk/index.php/jll>
**Spiritual Development in 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World by Elif Shafak**
<sup>1</sup>Khadija, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Muhammad Akbar Khan, <sup>3</sup>Zainab Akram

<sup>1</sup>MPhil Scholar, The University of Chenab, Gujrat.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Languages, The University of Chenab, Gujrat .

<sup>3</sup>MPhil Scholar, The University of Chenab, Gujrat

**Article Info**

Article History:

 \*Corresponding author: (M. Khan)  
[makbar@lang.uchenab.edu.pk](mailto:makbar@lang.uchenab.edu.pk)
**Keywords:**

 Spiritual development,  
 William Chittick,  
 Sufism,  
 quest for meaning,  
 inner journey,  
 Ten Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange  
 World

**Abstract**

The spiritual development in this study relates to the real purpose of life, which exerts influence on every person's activity. It is not about religious affiliation or becoming more spiritual. It is the innate realization and connection of oneself with the divine. This study delves into the canon of spirituality, William C. Chittick, by contextualizing the quest for meaning, identity, and transcendence with explicit reference to Elif Shafak's novel *Ten Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World*. By scrutinizing the selected novel through the lens of Chittick's spiritual underpinnings, this paper unmasks how a spiritual journey seeks nothing in the sense of achieving worldly gains. By doing so, this study investigates the elements of spiritual development in ordinary life with the quest for truth and meaning. It also indicates that without being prejudiced, a person examines and transforms himself. The spiritual path in Chittick and Shafak's novel portrays the situation clearly. It gives the essence of spiritual development without being confined to typical religious norms, which makes this study a significant aspect of inner change.

**Introduction**

This study spotlights the dominant elements of spirituality in the novel *Ten Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World* by Shafak (2019). Spirituality is the central notion in Islamic tradition. It is an art of modern literature that Shafak (2019) weaves the threads of spiritual and existentialism together. This novel is set in the bustling streets and hidden alleyways of Istanbul which adore the spiritual quest of meaning for Leila.

The researchers explore Leila's spiritual journey which is an underlying idea in the whole novel. The story unfolds in the final moments of Leila's consciousness which seems her last breath. Scientifically those are last breaths but the spiritual connection here is that it is the first step of awareness and recognition. The protagonist steps into the strange world just before her death and explores herself with tastes and fragrances that Leila adored a lot before death.

This whole story offers a unique perspective of life, memory, transcendence, and beyond. It also gives insights into the inner journey and self-exploration. This research aims to intricate the spiritual themes and spiritual journey of knowing towards recognition. Another aim of this research is to explore the interconnectedness of Leila with the five companions named as water family in the novel.

Shafak (2019) skillfully writes this story with multiple elements and the researchers delve into the spiritual self-reflection and self-discovery of the protagonist through the lens of her intense journey. The life of a prostitute not only gives sensory images but also shows the self-reflection of it. They are not prostitutes by choice. The spiritual elements, culture, and her sufferings are the amalgamation of her whole journey.

The researcher explores the canon of spirituality with the use of William C. Chittick's (1943) teachings on spirituality. The researchers pose various lines from William C. Chittick's (1943) published books and articles to explore the canon of spirituality in the novel. The quest for meaning seems easy but difficult in its true sense. William C Chittick (1943) said that Anyone who lives through the real will never die.

The story of the novel is emotional in its sense. But the connection of mind, body, and soul sheds light on the spiritual awareness. It gives rise to the journey of finding true meaning. It is a journey of exploration of the divine. Leila's whole journey is not merely confined to a spiritual quest but demonstrates a whole transformation of personality. The tragic end of the novel explores the recognition of the soul. William C Chittick's (1943) human task is to rectify the heart. The death portrayed by Shafak is a death of the body but the awakening of the soul.

William Chittick's (1943) recognition is a specific sort of knowing. Leila knows but recognizes the strange world. It seems fictional but Shafak elucidates the spiritual development which weaves the William C Chittick sayings. We are born with this recognition but tend to forget it. The goal of spiritual development is to remember what we have forgotten. This takes a whole journey in quest of meaning and realization (Chittick w. c., 2016)

### Literature Review

Elif Shafak's novel *Ten Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* is her most intense novel of her. This masterpiece of hers dealt with Eastern and Western cultures, the roles of women in society, self-exploration, self-reflection, love and compassion, and certain human issues.

Shafak wrote in multiple voices and amalgamated the diverse cultures in it. The setting in Istanbul clearly shows her skillful art of writing as Istanbul is a city of diverse cultures and religions.

Sarah Jilani (2019) in her dissertation *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this strange world* says about the mind of Leila who is a prostitute of 40 years old in Istanbul in the 1990s. She recalls her conscious and unconsciousness through the smells of eatables and objects. She further elucidates that she recalls things that she even did not know. She was even capable of remembering her childhood memories that how she was born and saved during the early days of her illness. The tang of salt evokes her birth and her father has two wives. She is of two mothers but she is unaware of all these truths. She mentioned her five friends as social outcasts: Nalan a trans sex worker, Zaynabb 122 a Lebanese dwarf, Hollywood humeral a depressed nightclub singer, sabotage Sinan a timid man infatuated with Leila and Jameelah who has been trafficked from Somalia. These five ones make her whole life beautiful and meaningful. She loved them more than her family. She describes every memory as a hula hoop stands for adolescent rebellion against her conservative family. A bracelet for a brother with Down's syndrome and a watermelon for summer uncle began to sexually abuse her. Each chapter of her life unfolds tragically and each sensory image depicts the whole meaning and memory of her life.

Tahri (2022) says that feminism and criticism of literary studies are widely known now. Literature uses various methods and techniques to create awareness of women about the equality of sexes in all disciplines including psychology, linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies. Leila's character as a prostitute is the depiction of how a personality transformed in a constricted and discriminated environment. How a personality shapes and grows in debris and how concepts of rape are taken for granted. The applications of mimesis and semiotics are based on the illustration of mind, body, and soul. The reader can easily depict through the protagonist character of Leila and by the close reading of the text. This study used the two theories in two different ways. The theory of Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler. Firstly, how Leila's character is victimized and marginalized in patriarchal notions. How she is exploited as a sex worker in the whole novel. Secondly the applications of mimesis and semiotic notions. By close reading, it can be depicted through mind, body, and soul recognition.

Their article investigates the alienation and environment regarding eco-materialist feminism in Elif Shafak's novel. This paper uncovers the effects of materialism on working-class women. This study made up its data through purposive sampling and qualitative approach under the interpretative paradigm. This paper finds out the male dominance in the novel and the subjugation of women. This all deals with men's dominance and exploitation of women under their rule. Man becomes the reason for exploitation by the submissiveness of women. Man becomes a reason to disrupt nature in search of his own needs. In hunger for his own rule, he disturbs the aura of society. Due to this woman suffers a lot. Shafak in her novel (2019) portrays the submissiveness of women and male dominance over nature, the environment, and women. This paper explores the canon of feminism and materialist eco-feminism in particular.

Mehdi, Uzma, and Abbasi (2022) in their article *Abjection and Marginalization of Females: A Critical Review of Leila's Character in Elif Shafak's Novel 10 minutes 38 seconds in this Strange World*. They emphasized on abjection faced by Leila. They deal with the physical and psychological violence of the protagonist as described by the author. This particular class of sex worker faces huge discrimination and suppression during their work. The prostitutes who are mostly forced to do this work are sexually abused and mistreated and this research deals with those reasons who are all behind this. The researchers try to ponder upon the treatments of Leila and how she is treated in her whole journey of her life the fact is that she is a prostitute. To contextualize this discussion within an educational framework, the study also draws parallels between the challenges faced by Leila and the struggles encountered by marginalized individuals, including teachers (Ramzan et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2021) and students (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023; Ramzan et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2022), in navigating societal norms

Incorporating educational policies into this discourse (Ramzan et al., 2023; Akram, 2020), it is essential to consider the impact of governmental regulations on marginalized communities (Ramzan et al., 2023; Akram & Yang, 2021), including gender-based workers. Djohar (2022) represents the patriarchal system in Elif Shafak's novel. It elucidates how the novel describes the sufferings of animals and the subjugation of their rights and also related to gender issues. This study was framed by animal metaphor theory and the theory of the patriarchal structures proposed

by Sylvia Walby 1990. Shafak uses five animals to describe the suffering, decisiveness, and being trapped. Animals used in the novel are cats, deer, blue betta fish, horses, turtles, and spiders. Shafak uses five wild animals and shows how these animals are trapped and lack freedom like women in society. Birds and butterflies are symbols of freedom but they are being trapped or killed which symbolizes the lack of independence. The woman's personality is hidden or killed by men and submerged in society. The misuse of power kills the beauty and freedom of women in conservative society.

Atta ullah (2021) says that feministic study serves to study gender identities and to explore the socially constructed gender roles in patriarchal Turkish society as written in the novel (Shafak, 2019). In these novels, men and women have different gender roles and they have to carry their particular traits as given by the society. They also explore how men misuse their power to discriminate the women. They mistreated them based on their power relations. Due to dominance, they marginalized them and suppressed them. Men feel women are inferior to them. In this way, they exploit the individuality of women. Women have to follow the traits as per societal choice. If they negate, they have to face social discrimination. They collected the textual data to explain the theme of women's subjugation in the patriarchal society. They also described the theory of Simon de Beauvoir's feminist stances and social role theory. This explains the gender power, passivity of women, and subjectivity of men in Turkish society. They also explored Fairclough's three-dimensional model for the qualitative analysis of 10 minutes 38 seconds in *This Strange World* by Elif Shafak (Shafak, 2019). The characters, behaviors, and attitudes show the masculinity of men and how they lead positions in society to subjugate women. They just want women whose duty is to nurture children and be confined to home only and obey their husbands. In this study, they try to educate through Shafak's writings that women should educate their selves and realize their selves and have to Speak for their rights. They have to fight for their own space and not be confined to restricted rules and regulations of society.

### Research Methodology

This study is an interpretive type of research in which the researchers have read the text *ten minutes 38 seconds in This Strange World* by Elif Shafak keeping in view the ideas of spirituality by Chittick. This interpretative research is chosen for this research to explore the deep understanding of spirituality according to the writings of William C. Chittick (2016). This qualitative approach is particularly suited to this research because the researchers delve into the deep analysis of spiritual elements in Shafak's Novel. The researchers keenly observed and related the characters of Shafak's Novel with the writings of William C Chittick (2013).

This can be justified in this deep analytical research that the interpretative method is suitable. This method gives a deeper understanding of the text and its themes and interprets the complex meanings from it. The researcher skillfully explores the spirituality in the novel (Shafak, 2019) and gives a deeper understanding of its complex themes.

The researchers explore the canon of spirituality and focus on the spiritual development of characters in Shafak's novel through the lens of William C Chittick's (1943) teachings. How spiritual elements transform an ordinary man and how it affects his whole life. The researchers skillfully peep into the text and draw upon Leila's journey of quest for truth and meaning. The event of Leila's tragic death opens various facets of spiritual development to the researchers. Shafak (2019) says that it is a fictional story with real characters as Chittick (1943) says that those who recognize real will never die.

William Chittick (2016) is an American philosopher, translator, writer, and interpreter of classical Islamic philosophical and mystical texts. He is best known for his work on Rumi and Ibn Arbi. Researcher uses his books and articles as a framework for this work. He writes on spirituality as an integral part of Islamic knowledge. He discovers the deep and major connection between Sufism and Islamic tradition. He uses Rumi and various saints' teachings not only to embellish his work but also to give critical insights into it. He also elucidates that spiritual awareness and closeness to God is the central notion of spirituality. Chittick's works light up the philosophical dimensions of Sufi thought. It also delves into the transformative and awareness journey of the person in his whole life. How a person transforms in this material world with the help of Islamic knowledge and awareness from within himself

### Textual Analysis

The primary purpose of this literary analysis of the work. It highlights the clear and intelligible analysis of the source which is Spirituality given by many Sufis and philosophers. The Researcher uses William C Chittick's works to explore spirituality in the novel. Through deep analysis, the researcher tends to connect that spiritual knowledge to the story of an intense novel by Elif Shafak. *Ten Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World* (Shafak, 2019) is not only a story of a prostitute. It is a journey of realization and a quest for truth.

According to intellectual tradition, the final goal of intellects or Sufis is to awaken people to truth. The only way of realization is within which is found in the heart. It can be understood as accepting things as they are. Sufis called actualizing of intellect as *all*. The legacy of "living" is described by ibn al-Arabi. It is a legacy of living souls.

According to early Sufi teacher Abu Bakar al-Wasiti ‘Anyone who lives through himself is dead and anyone who lives through the Real will never die (chittick, 2013, p. 125)

As in the novel *Ten Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World* (2019) the character of Leila is chasing true realization throughout her life. Her childhood is full of teachings of Islamic traditions, but no one teaches her the reason for it. It is a dilemma for her why all Muslims are permitted to not do this instead of that. She loves dancing but her father always said *it is a time-honored tactic to lead humans astray* (Shafak, 2019, p. 33).

Her father is involved in the business of making such fashionable dresses but he never allows his family members to wear them. This creates confusion in the mind as Leila why people are taking religion and God so rigid. In the case of money and greed, he never takes the support of religious teachings but as far as their purpose religion becomes a priority

After she decided to leave home secretly, she decided to pursue her realization journey. Living life as a prostitute is by bad luck but she accepts it. Even shame and regret filled her heart with every second. *Few knew that the excitement was accompanied by a surge of guilt* (Shafak, 2019, p. 143) After her tragic death, she avails the actual path that she is in vain to achieve in this material world.

This describes the concept of a living legacy. She is dead in the eyes of the world but she is free and alive in the other world. That world might be strange to others but for her, that one is the actual and real world. That world is full of life, happiness, and freedom. *There was no pain down here* (Shafak, 2019, p. 304)

The heart is the core of human beings and consciousness. The Quran and Hadith repeatedly say to clean and purify the heart to embrace spiritual light within. Islam links much more with the heart, not with the brain. Chinese use the “mind” word instead of heart to make sense for modern readers (Murata, 1992) in the novel (Shafak, 2019) the protagonist Leila is dealing with a mind working and realizing her hardback emotions and events. She was waiting for someone who would come and take her in light. *She was waiting for the sun to rise* (Shafak, 2019, p. 3)

William Chittick (2016) talks about recognition or recognizing the heart’s life with God. As a noun, it is translated as knowledge, science, and particularly in the context of Sufism as gnosis. The active participle of this is ‘arif’ or ‘irfan’ which is the same as ‘marifa’. These are Samani’s terms for recognition. In Arabic, the word for knowing is ‘ilm’.

The difference between ilm and marifa is the same as knowing and recognizing, knowing is basic but recognizing is a specific sort of knowing (chittick, the sufi path of knowledge, 1989). As in the novel the protagonist Laila deals with both levels in her spiritual journey of knowing. When she recognized it she was dead and far from this painful world. She recognizes herself in her soul which is distant from her body and her every inch of material thing.

Another thought applicable here is to recover your lost heart. The Mencius teachings that the goal of life is to recover our lost hearts. *As she fell..... away from this madness* (Shafak, 2019, p. 302) . The knowledge that comes from outside is ilm and the knowledge that comes from the inside is marifa.

Leila also deals with both. She is consuming knowledge from elders and books. Her inner self continuously demanding for questioning and recognition of truth. If a father is doing this why he is doing this? If a mother is hiding something due to her father's fear, then where is the fear of God? Why am I not supposed to dance and wear clothes like other models? Why am I supposed to cover the head with a scarf?

In terms of the Islamic creation myth recognition of the true nature of the things is latent in the heart because God taught Adam the names when he created him. The recognizers are those who achieve who they really are and who they truly are. In novel the Leila is achieving her recognition which seems to reader her after death. She is achieving her true sense in those ten minutes and 38 seconds in the strange world. That world is beyond words like die or decompose. That world is more than a living. *She was happy to be a part of this vibrant realm.....bright as new flame.... ..free at last* (Shafak, 2019, p. 304)

The knowledge we gain in our schools, and universities includes language, history, scripture, and everything is transmitted knowledge. The intellectual knowledge is contrary to it. It is discovered and recognized within ourselves. We may gain it from others, but we eventually explore it within ourselves with time. Once we achieve it, it is unveiled to us.

As Leila finds it and discovers it and then she feels unburdened like a beta fish. Her life events were full of abuse, marginalization, discrimination, and sex exploitation but the researcher explored her inner self. She is constantly fighting to gain the intellectual knowledge. Which she achieved at the end of the story. For some readers, it is a tragic end of Leila but for spiritual seekers, they know it’s a victory. It is a journey from the graveyard of companionless to the realm of eternity.

Leila’s spiritual journey is not like ordinary religious practices rather it is a deep personal quest for truth, meaning, and interconnectedness. Shafak skillfully amalgamates the spirituality with the turmoil and sufferings of Leila. As she faced family strictness, her water family of five friends became more valuable till the end. How her



family shapes her identity and how she questions herself during her upbringing. All this give rise to her spiritual consciousness.

William Chittick (1943) talks about inner journey and self-reflection. It has been said that the highest attainment of Sufism is nothing but good character. The spontaneous beauty of character is a long process of matureness and its transformation. Everything comprises a heart and a soul. He further explained Rumi's teachings in his book (chittick j. a., 1983) that *seek the spirit*. He means to go beyond your animal nature and combine it with the spiritual world. As we experience, we come to know spirit is nothing but awareness. A person has greater awareness and has higher spirit. The reason our spirit being greater than our animal spirit is that we have more awareness of it. The spirits of saints are also greater than ours because of their whole journey of experiences and awareness.

As in Leila's journey she has a heart. She also gets hurt. We humans are selfish. We never care about others' hearts or feelings. We often bash them and even hurt them without knowing. During her whole inner discovery, she is kind-hearted to humans as well as to animals. This *adab* (chittick w. c., 2016) weaves her whole spiritual personality. If she is a prostitute, she is kind-hearted, she is full of grace, she is not selfish, and she loves her water family which she calls friends. all these traits are the main ingredients of her self-reflection. These are the embellishments of the soul. *People were being rocked in the arms of loved ones in their moments of distress* (Shafak, 2019, p. 298)

William Chittick (1943) also talks about transcendence and beyond. He further describes that the transcendence goes beyond due to the strong connection of man with the divine through various experiences. It involves various mystical practices and the transformative journey of the person through his whole life. It is merely the transformative journey of the soul which is united with the transcendent quality. He discusses the notion of 'beyond' in the Sufi metaphysics. The beyond refers to the experience of the soul which is free from material and intellectual dimensions. He further elucidates that the ultimate goal of the soul is to explore the divine nature and go beyond his self and ego. Chittick writings mainly focus on an inner journey, inner purification, and the quest of real and quest for beyond in Sufi.

As in the novel Leila's journey after death and experiencing her hardback memories gives a transcendent experience that is beyond the physical realm. This whole story portrays of love and compassion toward friends and relations which echoes Chittick's views on the significance of love. The soul of Leila finally meets with the divine at the end of the story. This elaborates the sufi thought of the inner quest for divine. She finally achieves the divine and real place. That place is full of peace and away from pain.

### Conclusion

In the preceding research article, the researchers ventured through the convoluted tapestry of spirituality as described by Elif Shafak in *10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world*. This novel not only serves multiple facets of self-discovery, love, and compassion of relations but also delves into the intersection of spirituality and culture. This journey is not only a journey of the protagonist but is emblematic of the broader spiritual quests. Individuals undertake these quests to restrain and freedoms of their cultural environment. Leila's spiritual journey is not constrained to traditional religious practices but also a rich tapestry of her life experiences, memories, and her relationship with her friends more than family. These connections she forged whenever she encountered and called them her water family. The major challenge the researchers faced during the whole work was that Leila's spiritual quest was beyond the boundaries of organized religion. This shows that religion is personal and also amalgamates with the secular aspects of life. The intersection of spirituality and culture is dynamic but sometimes disputable in some contexts. This story with the modern culture straddles with spiritual notions which gives a huge backdrop for the exploration of spirituality. The city itself becomes a central notion to discover spirituality in it. It has multiple religious and spiritual facets within its boundaries. The researcher sees through Leila's eyes while exploring spirituality. She sees Istanbul as a search for meaning as a universal venture due to the intermingling of sacred and profane. This text is enriched with complex interplay with literature and spirituality and the human condition.

### References

- Abbasi, M. M. (2022). Abjection and marginalization of females Acritical review of leila's character in elif shafak novel. *PAKISTAN JOURNAL OF GENDER STUDIES*.
- chittick, j. a. (1983). *the sufi path of love*. united states of america: university of newyork press albany.
- chittick, w. c. (1989). *the sufi path of knowledge*. albany press.
- chittick, w. c. (2013). *divine love: islamic literature and the path of god*. yale university press.
- chittick, w. c. (2016). *ibn al arabi the doorway to an intellectual tradition*. muhyiddin ibn arabi society CIO.

- Akram, H., Aslam, S., Saleem, A., & Parveen, K. (2021). The challenges of online teaching in COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of public universities in Karachi, Pakistan. *Journal of Information Technology Education Research*, 20, 263.
- Ramzan, M., Javaid, Z. K., & Fatima, M. (2023). Empowering ESL Students: Harnessing the Potential of Social Media to Enhance Academic Motivation in Higher Education. *Global Digital & Print Media Review*, VI, 224-237.
- Ramzan, M., Javaid, Z. K., & Ali, A. A. (2023). Perception of Students about Collaborative Strategies Employed by Teachers for Enhancing English Vocabulary and Learning Motivation. *Pakistan JL Analysis & Wisdom*, 2, 146.
- Ramzan, M., Javaid, Z. K., Kareem, A., & Mobeen, S. (2023). Amplifying Classroom Enjoyment and Cultivating Positive Learning Attitudes among ESL Learners. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(2), 2236-2246.
- Ramzan, M., Azmat, Z., Khan, M. A., & un Nisa, Z. (2023, June). Subject-Verb Agreement Errors in ESL Students' Academic Writing: A Surface Taxonomy Approach. In *Linguistic Forum-A Journal of Linguistics* (Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 16-21).
- Akram, H., & Abdelrady, A. H. (2023). Application of ClassPoint tool in reducing EFL learners' test anxiety: an empirical evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Computers in Education*, 1-19.
- Akram, H., & Yang, Y. (2021). A critical analysis of the weak implementation causes on educational policies in Pakistan. *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)*, 4(1), 25-28.
- Akram, H. (2020). Education governance in Pakistan: A critical analysis of challenges. *Journal of Social Sciences Advancement*, 1(1), 38-41.
- Akram, H., Bhutto, M. H., & Chughtai, M. S. (2022). An analysis of business students' stressors and their coping strategies in the post-pandemic era. *Decision*, 49(2), 239-252.
- djohar, s. k. (2022). gender and animals in elif shafak 10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world. *sunan kalijaga international journal of Islamic civilization*.
- Jilani, s. (2019). 10 minutes and 38 seconds in this strange world. *TLS Times Literary Supplement*.
- Mariam Atta ullah, D. M. (2021). Gender and power: A Feminist Critical Discourse analysis of Elif Shafak's 10 minutes 38 seconds in this Strange World. *psychology and education journal*.
- Murata, s. (1992). *on the central role of the heart in Islamic thought The Tao of Islam*. sunny press.
- Shafak, E. (2019). *10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world*. istanbul: penguin books.
- Shaheen, A. J. (2022). Alienation and environment in 10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world an eco materialist. *Palarch's Journal of the archaeology of Egypt*.
- Taheri, A. S. (2022). Silenced Voices A feministic study of Elif Shafak 10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world. *research gate conference paper*.



@ 2024 by the author. Licensee University of Chitral, Journal of Linguistics & Literature, Pakistan. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).