

# The Silent Women Of Murakami: Deconstructive Analysis Of Gender's Voicelessness In Kafka On The Shore, And Norwegian Wood

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## **Abstract:**

Haruki Murakami, in his literary work, often explores the complexities of human existence while weaving fantastical tales that overthrow accepted social manners. This paper will explain how characters of Murakami's writings negotiate and overthrow patriarchal systems in order to examine the issue of freedom through the lens of the deconstruction of patriarchy in his works. Through an analysis of his major works, such as *Norwegian Wood* and *Kafka on the Shore*, this research illuminates Murakami's skillful depictions of gender relations and the challenge to conventional masculine norms.

Evidently, in Murakami's works, the main characters usually embark on introspective and metamorphosis journeys that cause them to reflect on patriarchal expectations and ultimately reject them. In *Norwegian Wood*, the protagonist Toru Watanabe offers an analysis of toxic masculinity through his journey of introspection, which exposes the emotional weakness repressed by the norms of society. Similarly, the character of Kafka Tamura in *Kafka on the Shore* deals with an identity crisis and the oppressive history of his father, symbolizing the huge struggle against patriarchal control.

This study explains how Murakami in his works used the method of deconstruction to challenge the orthodox patriarchal ideologies by analysing symbolic imagery, broken storytelling, magical realism, and narrative devices. Murakami provides a space where characters can face and conquer the norms imposed on them by patriarchal society by reducing the gap between fantasy and reality, and go through the stage of metamorphosis. In order to liberate the characters, this deconstruction challenges readers' preconceived notions of power and gender.

In conclusion, this research deals with Murakami's writings, which provide a dynamic analysis of patriarchy and favour a more liberal and comprehensive concept of identity. Murakami, through his skilful story-weaving technique, encourages the readers to imagine a society freed from patriarchal restrictions and which deepens the understanding of the complexity of gender and the possibility of both individual and societal change.

**Keywords:** Haruki Murakami, Deconstruction, Patriarchy, Gender Roles, Identity, Liberation.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Deconstruction is a literary theory that emerged in the late 1960s through the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). In popular usage, the term has come to mean a critical dismantling of tradition and the traditional way of thinking. According to Derrida, all Western thoughts focus on the concept of "centre"- an Immovable Mover, Fixed Point, an Ideal Truth etc. In doing so, they attempt to exclude or marginalise, which later becomes "others". For example, the famous French Feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir in her famous work *The Second Sex* has described how the patriarchal society is male-centric and puts the females on the margin, which makes them "other". As a result which they are repressed, ignored, and pushed away from the main society. Deconstruction also involves a close analysis of a text to identify the underlying binary pairs and in what way they are contradictory. By highlighting the ways in which language challenges its own meaning, and has hierarchies of meanings, it aims to disprove the idea that language can provide objective meaning.

In Haruki Murakami's novels *Kafka on the Shore* and *Norwegian Wood*, patriarchal structures are depicted as an influential force that shapes the characters' lives and their identities. However, through the use of magical realism, surrealism, complex characters, and narrative techniques, Murakami has deconstructed the patriarchal ideologies and suggested that freedom from the patriarchy is possible with the help of transformation in the individual and society. The objective of this paper is to examine how the traditional patriarchal norms and structures of society have affected the characters' lives and how Murakami has deconstructed the patriarchal ideologies through his plot, character, magical realism, and surrealism. To achieve the goal, the methodology that will be taken into consideration is literary analysis,

which is a close reading of the selected novels, a theoretical framework that will explain the feminist and deconstruction theory, and a comparative approach that will compare and contrast the depiction of patriarchy and its deconstruction in selected novels. Although work on Haruki Murakami has been done, like "Privileging Oddity and Otherness: A Study of Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*" by Rasleen Kaur and Vani Khurana but this research has come up with an idea which has not been explored yet.

*Norwegian Wood* provides traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures through the relationship of its characters. As the protagonist Toru Watanabe interacts with several women, each of them is affected by the expectations of the patriarchal society and their personal trauma. for example, Naoko suffers from her mental health issue, which was amplified because of following the traditional patriarchal norms, which eventually led to her tragic suicide. Midori, another important female character, shows her courage by challenging the traditional gender roles, yet she is unable to navigate the patriarchal world ruled by patriarchal expectations. In *Kafka on the Shore*, the protagonist Kafka Tamura explores the theme of patriarchy. He was a 15-year-old kid who ran away from his abusive father. His journey was to search for self-identity and get liberation from his father's extremely oppressive influence. There is a female character, Miss Saeki, whose life was a reflection of her relationships with the men in her life.

In *Norwegian Wood*, there is a scrambled narration presented about Toru Watanabe's memories, which are presented in a fragmented way. This approach deconstructs the concept of singular narrative, aligning with the theory of deconstruction. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami uses surrealism and Magical realism to deconstruct the already existing notion of identity and reality. These works often explore complex themes like existentialism, patriarchy, and deconstruction, along with intersecting the concept of gender studies and post-structuralist theory, which will provide a nuanced analysis of the construction and maintenance of patriarchal structures and their challenges within literary texts. Along with the concept of deconstruction traditional interpretation of text has been challenged, as this approach emphasizes diverse interpretations and the flexibility of meaning. As for patriarchy, it is important as it addresses the social issues of the society and showcases that the traditional patriarchy is not only affecting the females of the society, but males are also getting affected by it in a similar manner. Haruki Murakami has presented a nice amalgamation of patriarchy and deconstruction, which has not been discovered yet, and this paper aims to cover every aspect of this extremely magical work of Murakami by providing a new landmark in the field of English literature.

### **Patriarchy and Deconstruction**

Murakami in *Kafka on the Shore* has depicted a world where patriarchal values are clearly evident and challenged. As the novel goes along with the journey of Kafka Tamura's escape from his house at the age of fifteen due to his father's nature and Oedipal curse on him. His journey from escaping from home, finding out about his own existence, and overcoming the Oedipal curse is a representation of the dominance and overpowering of his father on his psyche. There is evidence in the novel that patriarchy has not only disturbed the life of male but female too, Miss Saeki is an excellent example of this, as she being a librarian and financially independent should not get influenced by the gender norms of the society, but her past has been so traumatising that even after being financially independent she is still suffering from the pain which this patriarchy has forced upon her.

As her personality in the present represents what her past has made her. In *Norwegian Wood* patriarchy of the 1960s has been portrayed in Japanese society, where few people are questioning and rebelling against the traditional gender roles, but a majority of people are still trapped in the vicious circle of gender roles and societal norms. Naoko and Midori are examples of these two ideologies, as Naoko is struggling due to her mental health, and there is no one to help her, to take her out of the dark hole, and as a result of this, she has to go back to the sanatorium to keep herself stable. On the other hand, there is Midori, progressive and empowered with her free ideology; she is independent, assertive, and challenges the traditional gender roles and societal norms by expressing her desires openly.

Deconstruction is evident in *Kafka on the Shore* through the different narrative style of storytelling, as there is a dual narrative intertwining the story of Kafka Tamura and Nakata, creating a fragmented and non-aligned narration which disrupts the conventional notions of identity. Here in this work, the themes of identity and reality are subject to deconstruction, Kafka's surreal journey for the upliftment of the curse, and self-identification change the way of interpretation of the text. In *Norwegian Wood*, Toru's relationship with Naoko and Midori shows the tension between the idealised notion of love and the reality of society. Naoko's struggle with her mental health represents the theme of deconstruction through the lens of complexity and ambiguity.

### Representation of Patriarchal structures

Haruki Murakami, in his novels, has talked about gender identity, human relationships, and the norms of society. One of the most prominent themes in his work is the representation of patriarchal structures and their effect on the characters of his novel. In *Kafka on the Shore*, patriarchal norms are represented through the relationships between the characters and expectations of the society that moulded the lives of the characters. The protagonist, Kafka Tamura, went on a journey to escape from his reality of life, which is his father and his oppressive influence on him. Kafka's father, Koichi Tamura, reflect the character of authoritarian patriarch, through his manipulative and controlling personality which leave his son Kafka with deep psychological scars for lifetime and says that "My father is a famous sculptor, and he's always been a very controlling person. He's always tried to shape me into what he wants me to be". Miss Saeki, the female character of the novel, haunted by her past and the loss of her lover, who was killed by none other than her father, tries her level best to navigate the patriarchal society. Her life is a depiction of the consequences of patriarchal violence and control, and she is a tragic figure of her story, trapped in the result of the destruction of her life done by the powerful patriarchy and left her as a living body without any emotions "I'm just a memory, a shadow of what I once was".

It is evident from the writings of Murakami that he deconstructs the patriarchal ideologies through the use of magical realism, surrealism, and the development of complex characters. In *Kafka on the Shore*, the character of Oshima, a transgender librarian, challenges the traditional gender roles and norms as his existence itself defies the binary gender expectations imposed by society. "I'm not a woman, and I'm not a man. I'm me." This statement by Oshima explains how he is trying to put his point of view as an individual in this patriarchal society.

There is no denying that in *Norwegian Wood*, Murakami has depicted a more grounded explanation of patriarchal structures by focusing on the lives of young adults in Japan in the 1960s. Toru Watanabe, the protagonist, directs the relationships moulded by the expectations of society and the gender norms made by them. As the female characters, Naoko and Midori, both face the pressure from the patriarchal society. As Naoko's struggle with her mental health is depicted by the trauma she faces after losing her boyfriend, Kizuki, and the expectations of society on her just because she is a female. Her delicate state of mind shows the impact of the pressure put on her through the norms made by the patriarchal society. As she confides in Toru, "I'm broken. I can't be fixed," shows how deeply she is trapped in the patriarchal framework. Midori, on the other hand, represents the more rebellious nature against the patriarchal norms. Through her independence, Midori challenges the traditional gender roles: "I'm not going to be anybody's wife or mother. I'm going to be me".

Through the representation of the life journey of the characters in his work, Murakami has deconstructed the patriarchal ideologies, as Toru's introspective journey and his relationships with Naoko and Midori show the complexities of navigating a patriarchal society. His suffrage and struggle in order to understand the issue of women and support them in their lives shows a very different effort from a male of this patriarchal society.

### Female Characters and Patriarchal Constraints

Novels by Murakami provide a compelling exploration of female characters overcoming patriarchal constraints. Both his novels, *Kafka on the Shore* and *Norwegian Wood*, showcase his refined approach to power dynamics and gender norms, casting back broader themes of personal identity and the expectations of society. In *Kafka on the Shore*, female characters play a very vital role in shaping the narration and the theme of existentialism. This Novel is an intertwining representation of the story of Kafka Tamura and Nakata, showing a variety of female figures challenging and confronting the patriarchal norms, as Miss Saeki is a representation of a tragic figure whose life has been affected by the norms made by the patriarchal society. She, as the manager of the library where the male protagonist Kafka Tamura often seeks refuge, incorporates both sorrow and knowledge. Her romantic and existential struggles are a consequence of the expectations of society. Her relationship with Kafka's father, Koichi, shows how the societal norms have left her to live with her unfulfilled desires and how she is trapped in the cycle of pain, sorrow, and regret.

Kafka's mother, who has been described and portrayed through his dreams and imaginations only, is an example of how a patriarchally dominated society can impact not only a female but also her family. As Murakami has explained in his novel that Kafka's mother took a very difficult decision to abandon him and his sister, which shows how much she was under the pressure of the society that she had to take this big and important decision of separating herself from her children.

In *Norwegian Wood*, the character of Naoko is described as the best presentation of the balance between personal trauma and the expectations of society. As she has been under lots of societal pressure, she has to struggle a lot with her daily life and her emotions, as there exists a world ruled by males and having their own rules and regulations which everyone has to deal with, whether they want it or not. Their rules and regulations have become the reason for her suffering, and no one but her is getting affected by it. Her ultimate retreat to a sanatorium shows that there is very little or a lack of support for females suffering from psychological issues. Midori, on the other hand, represents a more independent and modern personality and ideology as compared to Naoko, as she is steadfast and willing to change the patriarchal society, be it their norms or their expectations; she is ready to face the challenges and change the traditional patriarchal rule. Her willingness to express her desire is itself a big decision to change the norms of society when whereas other females are keeping mum and are facing the consequences of blindly and forcefully following the traditional patriarchal norms without fighting for their rights. Another female character, Reiko, who is roommate of, Naoko at the sanatorium, represents a form of female friendship and support system in times of hardship, as she has always tried her level best to support Naoko during her hard times.

### **Male Protagonist and Patriarchal Influence**

Murakami, in his novels, features the influence of traditional patriarchy and their societal norms, which have not only influenced females but males too. He, with the help of his character, provided a lens through which it is clearly visible that the patriarchy has had a negative impact on the identity, relationship, and personal growth of the characters. Kafka Tamura, the protagonist of *Kafka on the Shore*, a fifteen-year-old boy, runs away from his home in search of his long-lost mother and his sister in order to escape from the Oedipal curse. This act of running away from home shows the deep pressure of society on him and how this act has changed his life completely. His relationship with his father was not good, as he was manipulative and oppressive; his father's rigid and authoritative personality represents the rigidity of this patriarchal society.

Kafka's journey for his existential identity is a question of self, which imposes a strict expectation on masculinity. His self-doubt and questioning his own identity have put a big question mark on the masculinity of his father and the familial duty of his mother. It shows that this patriarchy has not only made masculinity toxic but has also forced females to either get suppressed under the burden of their norms or abandon the family, which ultimately leaves a fifteen-year-old boy running away from his own house in order to identify and search for his identity and existence. His interaction with the female characters reflects how he has been dealing with the patriarchal norms. His relationship with Miss Saeki is marked by some unfulfilled and unspoken emotions. These scenarios show the interactions highlight Kafka's understanding of gender and his desires with the expectations of society.

Whereas in *Norwegian Wood*, the protagonist, Toru Watanabe, a college student, faces the complexities of love, loss, and societal expectations of late 20th-century Japan. As his experiences are deeply rooted in the cultural and social norms of his time, it is evident that his interaction with the female characters of the novel, especially Naoko and Midori, is influenced by the gender norms and the difficulty of reconciling personal desires with expectations of society. Toru's relation with Naoko is the main theme of the novel, exploring the patriarchal influence. As Naoko's struggle with her mental illness and her retreat towards the sanatorium and Toru's helplessness show the inability of society to understand the issues of females and how little efforts are taken by society to help females in order to overcome their issues. In contrast to it, his relationship with Midori is reflected as more progressive, as her independence challenges the societal norms, which put Toru in his own insecurities in response to Midori's independence, reflecting the tension between their ideologies.

### **CONCLUSION**

Haruki Murakami, being a very dynamic writer in his writings, *Kafka on the Shore* and *Norwegian Wood* provided a very deep insight into the complexities of human relationships, societal norms, and identity. The central theme, apart from all these, is the exploration of patriarchy through the lens of deconstruction, and Murakami, through his craftsmanship of intertwining the lives, excellent narration, and characters, has provided the dismantling of patriarchal ideologies, revealing their influence on the transformation of an individual and societal transformation.

In both his works, it is clearly evident that patriarchal structures are deeply depicted in his characters' lives. These structures are displayed by the action and ideology of the male authority figures of the novel.

As Kafka Tamura's journey in order to find himself and his existence is the result of the rigid, oppressive, and dominant behaviour of his father, along with the Oedipal curse on him, that he will kill his father and sleep with his own sister, ultimately left him with psychological scars for a lifetime. Similarly, in *Norwegian Wood*, the protagonist Toru Watanabe directs the relationships moulded by expectations of the society and gender norms. As the female characters face the suppression of patriarchal society. Naoko reflects a fragile personality, while Midori reflects a powerful personality who is rebellious and is ready to change society in a good way.

Murakami has deconstructed the patriarchy through his character Oshima, in *Kafka on the Shore*, who is transgender, and he stands for himself, truly believing and confident regarding his identity and about himself. In *Norwegian Wood*, Murakami deconstructs the patriarchal ideologies through the journey of Toru Watanabe and his struggle to support and understand the women in his life reflects his limitations imposed by patriarchal society.

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