
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Breaking the Cage: Patriarchal Control, Women's Oppression, and Resistance in Shakespeare's *Othello* and Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Nari" in the Context of Bangladesh

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| ABSTRACT

This study examines women's oppression, patriarchal control, domestic confinement, violence, and female agency in William Shakespeare's *Othello* and Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Nari," with particular attention to contemporary Bangladesh. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the study analyzes the two primary texts alongside contemporary literature and socio-economic evidence on gender-based violence and women's conditions in Bangladesh. The findings show that *Othello* portrays how marital suspicion, male authority, surveillance, and control can develop into psychological and physical violence, while "Nari" directly challenges gender hierarchy by emphasizing women's equality, contributions, freedom, and resistance. The comparison further shows that domestic confinement and unequal power remain relevant concerns in contemporary Bangladesh. By connecting literary representations of gender oppression with present-day gender-related concerns, the study offers a perspective for students, researchers, educators, and readers interested in gender, literature, and Bangladesh.

| KEYWORDS

Patriarchal Control, Gender-Based Violence, Resistance, *Othello*, "Nari", Bangladesh Context.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The issues of oppression and control of women by the patriarchy have continued to be relevant in literary representations of marriage and family. Literature frequently reveals the nature of gender inequality through control, restrictions, expectations, and imbalances of power between men and women. The play *Othello* by William Shakespeare and "Nari" by Kazi Nazrul Islam are two examples of contrasting literary representations of these issues. Although the two works were produced in different historical periods and social contexts, both address questions of women's status and male domination (Neill, 2006; Adhikari, 2025).

The relationship between Othello and Desdemona gradually becomes marked by doubt and control in *Othello*. His jealousy causes him to control Desdemona's actions, question her chastity, and restrict her freedom. The play illustrates the destructive effects of marital power when a man assumes the right to control and question his wife.

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Desdemona's difficulty in defending herself and Emilia's challenge to masculine power also illustrate the complex nature of the female voice in the play (Bell, 2002; Time, 2003). Thus, the play provides a literary representation of how patriarchal control can develop from psychological pressure into physical violence.

The poem "Nari," on the other hand, makes a straightforward case against gender hierarchy. Written in 1925, the poem highlights the contributions of women to human civilization and questions the notion that women must always be subservient to men. In addition, the poem denounces women's confinement and demands liberation from patriarchy. Instead of presenting gender hierarchy through the suffering of a single woman, Nazrul discusses gender discrimination as a wider social issue and calls for resistance as a means of pursuing equality (Khanom, 2001; Islam, 1925/2010).

These literary concerns can also be examined in relation to contemporary Bangladesh. Gender-based violence, controlling behaviour, unequal domestic responsibilities, and restrictions on women's autonomy remain significant social concerns. The *Violence Against Women Survey 2024* reports that 75.9% of ever-married women experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence during their lifetime, while 67.6% experienced controlling behaviour (BBS & UNFPA, 2025). Women's unequal share of unpaid domestic and care work also demonstrates continuing gender disparities within households (Barford et al., 2024). Such realities provide a contemporary context for examining the themes of marital control, confinement, and women's agency in the selected literary works.

1.2. Aim, Objectives, and Research Questions

1.2.1. Aim

The study aims to comparatively examine *Othello* and "Nari" to understand women's oppression, patriarchal control, domestic confinement, and resistance, and to relate these literary concerns to the contemporary context of Bangladesh.

1.2.2. Objectives

- To examine how patriarchal control operates within marriage in *Othello*.
- To analyze how "Nari" challenges women's oppression and advocates equality and freedom.
- To compare the representation of domestic confinement, violence, and female agency in the two texts.
- To relate these literary representations to contemporary gender-based concerns in Bangladesh.

1.2.3. Research Questions

- How does patriarchal control operate through marriage and domestic relationships in *Othello*?
- How does "Nari" challenge women's oppression and patriarchal restrictions?
- How do the two texts represent women's resistance and agency?
- How can these literary representations be understood in relation to contemporary Bangladesh?

2. Literature Review

Existing scholarship on Shakespeare's *Othello* provides important perspectives on jealousy, marital authority, women's oppression, and violence. Research on Othello's jealousy examines its impact on his perception of Desdemona, supporting the present study's argument that jealousy can develop into suspicion and control within marriage (Bell, 2002). Research on female victimization and gender expectations in *Othello* also supports the view that Desdemona's fate is closely connected to gendered power relations (Time, 2003). The play has also been examined as a domestic tragedy in which marriage becomes a site of psychological pressure, distrust, and abuse, supporting the present study's focus on domestic relationships as sites of patriarchal control (Miller, 2020). Jealousy has further been connected with questions of dominance and power, supporting the interpretation of Othello's jealousy as a form of controlling behaviour (Song, 2021).

Research on Kazi Nazrul Islam provides a contrasting perspective on women's position. Nazrul's ideas concerning women, equality, and dignity support the argument that "Nari" challenges women's subordinate position in society (Khanom, 2001). The poem has also been discussed in relation to rebellion, emancipation, and equality, supporting the interpretation that it actively challenges restrictive patriarchal structures and encourages resistance (Adhikari, 2025).

Research on Bangladesh provides the contemporary context for the study. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Population Fund provide evidence on intimate partner violence and controlling behaviour, which helps connect the study's literary concerns with contemporary gender-based violence (BBS & UNFPA, 2025). In addition, research on unpaid care work in Bangladesh highlights gender differences in domestic responsibilities, supporting the argument that gender inequality also operates within the household (Barford et al., 2024).

2.1. Research Gap

Although these studies offer valuable insights into *Othello*, "Nari," and gender-related issues in Bangladesh, the two literary works are largely discussed separately. Limited attention has been given to comparing them through the connected themes of patriarchal control, domestic confinement, and resistance. There is also limited discussion connecting these literary themes with contemporary Bangladesh, particularly intimate partner violence, controlling behaviour, and unequal domestic responsibilities. Therefore, the present study brings *Othello* and "Nari" into a comparative framework and examines how their different representations of women's oppression and resistance can be understood in relation to contemporary gender concerns in Bangladesh.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

This research employs a qualitative comparative approach to examine the oppression of women, patriarchy, domestic confinement, and resistance in the play *Othello* by William Shakespeare and the poem "Nari" by Kazi Nazrul Islam. This research primarily deals with the analysis of the selected literary works rather than gathering statistical or experimental data. Contemporary Bangladesh is incorporated into the study as a contextual dimension.

3.2. Textual Analysis

Close textual analysis is the main technique of this research. Characters, dialogues, situations, images and themes from *Othello* and "Nari" have been selected for analysis based on the objectives of the research. In *Othello*, some of the important areas include Desdemona, Emilia, marital domination, jealousy, surveillance, silence, and violence. For the poem "Nari," some of the areas of analysis are gender equality, women's contributions, domestic confinement, freedom, and resistance. All English translations of Nazrul's "Nari" quotations in this manuscript are translated by the primary author unless otherwise noted. The poem was originally published in 1925, while 2010 refers to the primary source edition used in this study.

3.3. Comparative Method

The study compares the two works through common analytical themes rather than treating them as identical texts. *Othello* represents patriarchal control mainly through a tragic marital relationship, whereas "Nari" directly challenges gender inequality and advocates women's freedom. The comparison therefore considers both similarities and differences in the ways the two texts represent women's oppression, authority, confinement, and agency.

3.4. Theoretical Framework

Feminist Literary Criticism serves as the core theoretical perspective employed in the study. This perspective enables the analysis of gender representation, power relations, women's social status, and women's defiance of patriarchal authority. The notion of patriarchal control is another framework that facilitates an understanding of male dominance, limitations imposed on women's independence, and gender inequality.

3.5. Secondary Sources and Bangladesh Context

Secondary sources, such as scholarly studies, research papers, and institutional reports, have been employed to support the analysis and provide an understanding of the contemporary situation in Bangladesh. Studies of *Othello* help examine issues like jealousy, marital dominance, victimhood of women, and women's voice and silence. Research on Nazrul's poems provides insights into gender equality, oppression, liberation, and defiance in "Nari."

For the Bangladesh context, the study draws on recent institutional reports and research publications concerning gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, controlling behaviour, and unpaid care work. In particular, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Population Fund's *Violence Against Women Survey 2024* provides contemporary evidence on intimate partner violence and controlling behaviour, while research from the

International Labour Organization and United Nations Volunteers provides evidence concerning the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work. These sources are used as contextual evidence rather than as direct comparisons with the literary characters.

The study therefore combines primary literary texts, scholarly research, and contemporary institutional evidence to examine the relationship between literary representations of patriarchal control and gender-related concerns in contemporary Bangladesh.

4. Patriarchal Power and Marital Control in Othello

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, marriage is viewed as a partnership of trust, intimacy, and individual decision-making, but it is gradually revealed as one in which these elements can be undermined by patriarchal dominance. In this play, jealousy is more than an aspect of personal life; it becomes an element that connects suspicion with male dominance over a wife's sexuality, behavior, and reputation. As Othello's trust in Desdemona declines, he increasingly wants to monitor and control her actions. Marriage, thus, becomes a space where psychological manipulation and abuse begin to develop. In order to understand patriarchal dominance in this play, it is important to examine marriage, male authority, jealousy, female reputation, and women's responses to male control.

4.1. Marriage, Trust, and Male Authority

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, marriage initially appears to provide Desdemona with a degree of personal choice. She secretly marries Othello and openly defends her decision before the Venetian authorities, explaining that she has transferred her loyalty from her father to her husband (Neill, 2006, 1.3.179–188). Although this statement demonstrates her ability to choose her husband, it also reveals the patriarchal structure within which that choice is expressed: Desdemona describes her movement from her father's authority to her husband's authority. Thus, her marriage represents both an act of personal choice and a shift from one male authority figure to another. Her action indicates the possibility of the marriage becoming a site for individual freedom. Nevertheless, such freedom becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as Othello starts to view Desdemona through patriarchal assumptions about women's sexuality, submission, and loyalty within marriage.

The patriarchal assumptions surrounding Desdemona's marriage are also evident in the language used to describe her relationship with Othello. Iago refers to Othello as a "black ram" and Desdemona as a "white ewe," reducing the couple to animalistic and sexual imagery (Neill, 2006, 1.1.87–88). The description not only sexualizes Desdemona but also emphasizes the racial difference between the couple, presenting their interracial marriage as something threatening and transgressive. By reducing Desdemona to a sexualized body and Othello to a racialized animal, Iago's language reveals how gender and racial prejudice intersect in the social perception of their marriage.

Thus, the tragic process does not start with physical violence but rather develops gradually, as a loving relationship is transformed into one based on suspicion and patriarchal control. It is no longer a marriage defined by mutual choice, but rather by Othello's growing desire to know, judge, and control his wife.

This change is closely related to the theme of jealousy that appears in the play. Jealousy is not merely a reflection of Othello's feelings, but it gradually becomes a means of controlling Desdemona. Othello's jealousy is based greatly on imagined things and his desire to have proof of them (Bell, 2002). Iago exploits this uncertainty by presenting suspicion as if it were knowledge. His warning, "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!" (Neill, 2006, 3.3.195–196), is deliberately ironic because he is the person who creates the jealousy he pretends to warn Othello against.

4.2. Jealousy, Surveillance, and Control

Gradually, Iago teaches Othello how to interpret every normal act performed by Desdemona as an indication of sexual infidelity on her part. Instead of trusting Desdemona, Othello learns to watch, question, and judge her interactions with men. Iago's instruction to "Look to your wife; / observe her well with Cassio" turns marital trust into surveillance (Neill, 2006, 3.3.197–198). It is a significant step towards establishing control within the household because Desdemona is no longer regarded as an independent individual whose words have authority; her actions become something that needs to be watched and analyzed by her husband.

Iago's construction of female sexuality as unstable further strengthens this process of suspicion and control. When speaking to Roderigo, he claims that Desdemona will eventually become dissatisfied with Othello, arguing that "She must have change, she must" (Neill, 2006, 1.3.343–346). By presenting female desire as naturally changeable and female loyalty as temporary, Iago reproduces a patriarchal stereotype that women are inherently unfaithful. His claim is not evidence of Desdemona's character but a deliberate attempt to make distrust appear reasonable. Such a representation helps establish the ideological basis for surveillance: if women are assumed to be sexually unstable, male control can be presented as necessary for maintaining marital authority.

Iago's own attitude towards Emilia provides another example of how suspicion and possessiveness can operate within marriage. His suspicion that Othello may have had a sexual relationship with Emilia contributes to his hostility towards Othello. This suggests that Iago, like Othello, views a wife's sexuality through the framework of male authority and marital possession. The suspicion is therefore not simply about sexual betrayal; it is also connected to the idea that another man's access to his wife would threaten his own position and authority as a husband.

The handkerchief serves to heighten this effect. Othello requires evidence of his wife's supposed unfaithfulness, and the handkerchief is turned into a false symbol of her betrayal. From that moment on, reasonable communication between husband and wife becomes increasingly difficult. His repeated demand, "The handkerchief!" (Neill, 2006, 3.4.85), demonstrates how an ordinary object has acquired enormous authority within his imagination. Jealousy in *Othello* is hence linked with issues of power, marriage, and the need for certainty (Song, 2021). Othello replaces conversation with interpretation as he seeks to judge Desdemona's sexuality through a code that has been twisted by Iago.

4.3. Female Sexuality and Reputation

The play also shows the ways in which patriarchal authority works through the control of women's reputation. The issue of Desdemona's sexuality becomes the central concern despite her being innocent of any sexual affair. This is because a woman's value within the relationship becomes dependent on her husband's belief in her sexual fidelity.

This is due to a larger cultural pattern in which the sexual reputation of women can determine their social identity. The victimization of women in Shakespeare's plays can also be analyzed in light of social attitudes that make women vulnerable to slander and abuse (Time, 2003). Othello's attitude towards Desdemona also shows that patriarchal domination does not necessarily rely on physical violence in the beginning. Accusations, doubt, shame, and the fear of damage to a woman's reputation may be enough.

Desdemona attempts to defend herself verbally, but her voice increasingly loses authority within the marriage. When Othello demands that she account for herself, she responds, "Your wife, my lord, your true and loyal wife" (Neill, 2006, 4.2.37). Although her statement is straightforward, Othello has already constructed a narrative in which her statements do not serve as evidence of her innocence. The inequality between accusation and defense is what forms an important part of the play's depiction of patriarchal power.

4.4. Domestic Isolation and Violence

The process from mistrust to violence is progressive and increasingly destructive. Othello's jealousy leads to surveillance, surveillance leads to accusation, accusation leads to isolation, and isolation ultimately results in violence. As such, *Othello* may be viewed as a domestic tragedy where an intimate relationship turns into a source of destruction (Miller, 2020). The violence is especially disturbing because the domestic sphere, which is supposed to be a space of intimacy and safety, turns into a realm in which Desdemona is left unprotected.

Othello's physical assault of Desdemona is preceded by psychological violence. He insults her, questions her honesty, and increasingly treats her as an object whose behavior must be judged. His demand, "Let me see your eyes. Look in my face" (Neill, 2006, 4.2.30–31), illustrates his attempt to obtain what he considers to be the truth by controlling her body and expression. At the end of the play, this becomes the most extreme manifestation of this pattern. Desdemona dies not because she is found guilty but because Othello believes that she deserves to be punished.

The difference between the violent act and the societal perceptions that render the victim vulnerable is significant for understanding the role of Desdemona in the play (Time, 2003). Her murder is thus not simply an act of rage. It is the final step in an interpretive system in which the husband believes he has the right to judge his wife's sexuality and to punish her for what he believes are its consequences.

4.5. Desdemona, Emilia, and Female Resistance

The reactions of Desdemona and Emilia to this patriarchal society differ. Desdemona's initial decision to elope with Othello demonstrates that she is capable of exercising personal agency and making an independent choice about her marriage. By choosing Othello against the authority and expectations of her father, Brabantio, she initially challenges the patriarchal control over her choice of husband. Despite being abused by Othello, Desdemona still strives for reconciliation in her marriage. Her final statement, "Nobody—I myself" (Neill, 2006, 5.2.125), is especially tragic because she protects Othello even after he has killed her. Although this response reflects how deeply marital loyalty and obedience have been internalized, it should not be taken to mean that Desdemona lacks agency throughout the play. She repeatedly attempts to defend her marriage and assert her innocence, but her voice becomes increasingly ineffective as Othello assumes the authority to determine her guilt. Her final silence therefore illustrates not an absence of agency, but the extent to which patriarchal violence can restrict a woman's ability to make her voice heard.

Emilia, however, gradually moves toward open resistance. Earlier in the play, she recognizes the unequal expectations placed on wives, observing that "They are all but stomachs, and we all but food" (Neill, 2006, 3.4.93–95). More explicitly, she argues that "Their wives have sense like them" (Neill, 2006, 4.3.87–90). Her speech challenges the belief that husbands are more emotionally and morally powerful than their wives. In the final scene, she refuses to remain silent after discovering the truth, declaring, "Tis proper I obey him, but not now" (Neill, 2006, 5.2.195–196). Emilia's resistance is important, even though her stance cannot be reduced to a simplistic modern feminist standpoint. Her earlier involvement in the events that contribute to Desdemona's victimization, together with the racial and gender hierarchies within the play, complicates any straightforward interpretation of her as a feminist figure (Chakravarty, 2022).

Taken together, the experiences of these women reveal that patriarchy works in both the social and personal spheres in Othello. Desdemona is vulnerable as a result of the interplay between marital domination, sexual distrust, restricted voice, and violence, while Emilia reveals that resistance can emerge when remaining silent is no longer possible. In this way, domestic violence is shown as a process that develops through suspicion, control, isolation, and finally physical violence. This understanding provides a useful basis for turning to Nazrul Islam's "Nari," where women's confinement is addressed more directly and the demand for equality and liberation is presented as an explicit challenge to patriarchal control.

5. Equality, Confinement, and Resistance in "Nari"

Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Nari" presents a direct challenge to the social assumptions that place women below men. It was written in 1925 and was later included in his collection *Samyabadi*. Its argument was particularly striking in the context of early twentieth-century Bengal, where women's education, purdah, social seclusion, and women's rights were becoming important subjects of social reform and debate. Although women's emancipation movements had already begun to challenge women's restricted position, gender inequality remained deeply rooted in family and social structures. Nazrul's "Nari" therefore appeared within a period of growing debate about women's freedom and social participation, while his wider Samyabadi writings challenged social inequality and orthodox practices. The poem is based on the premises of equality, recognition, liberation, and resistance to patriarchal domination (Islam, 1925/2010).

In contrast to the portrayal of women as mere victims of social injustice, Nazrul presents women as active agents in the process of human civilization. In fact, the poem raises the issue of why women's contributions have not been adequately recognized and why existing social institutions have deprived them of their freedom. Through its treatment of equality, domestic confinement, historical erasure, and female agency, "Nari" presents gender inequality as a social condition that can and should be resisted.

5.1. Equality as the Foundation of the Poem

Equality is established as the central principle of "Nari." The speaker rejects any fundamental distinction between men and women and presents equality as the proper basis of social relations (Islam, 1925/2010). The declaration, "In my eyes, there is no distinction between man and woman," makes this position explicit (Islam, 1925/2010). The poem does not simply ask men to show greater sympathy towards women; instead, it challenges the hierarchical structure that places men above women. Women are not portrayed as biologically or intellectually inferior to men.

The poem strengthens this argument by emphasizing that women have contributed substantially to human civilization. It presents the creation of everything "great and beneficial" as a shared contribution, stating that "Women have contributed half, and men have contributed half" (Islam, 1925/2010). This challenges historical accounts that associate human achievement primarily with men. Women are presented as creators rather than passive recipients, and their role in the social and cultural development of civilization becomes indispensable.

This focus on contribution also ties the issue of equality to recognition. When women have been part of the construction of civilization, their exclusion from historical recognition becomes another form of inequality. This is how the poem brings to light issues of both material and symbolic patriarchy. Women need liberation from social constraints, but they also need recognition for their contributions (Khanom, 2001).

5.2. Challenging the Cultural Construction of Female Inferiority

"Nari" also questions the cultural narratives that have historically associated women with moral weakness and social disorder. The poem challenges the idea that women should be regarded as responsible for humanity's moral failures or treated as inherently inferior (Islam, 1925/2010). By refusing to separate men and women into fundamentally different moral categories, the poem challenges the assumptions that have been used to justify women's unequal position. By questioning these assumptions, Nazrul moves the discussion of gender inequality from individual behaviour to the cultural beliefs that justify unequal treatment.

This point in the poem is especially noteworthy since patriarchal power tends to rely on concepts that are presented as natural or inherent. By portraying women as morally inferior, emotionally unbalanced, or dependent by nature, restrictions on their freedom can be presented as necessary or protective. "Nari" rejects this view by challenging the assumption that women are naturally inferior to men.

Further, the poem's engagement with ideas of religion and history helps strengthen its challenge to gender hierarchy. Rather than accepting traditional narratives about women without question, the poem reconsiders how such narratives have contributed to the construction of gender hierarchy (Adhikari, 2025). In this sense, Nazrul's argument is directed not only at unequal treatment but also at the beliefs that make such inequality appear legitimate.

5.3. Domestic Confinement and Patriarchal Control

The most compelling aspect of "Nari" is the depiction of women in confinement. The poem reveals an irony in patriarchal relationships where love coexists with oppression. A woman may be loved by a man while simultaneously being denied freedom and independence (Islam, 1925/2010). This distinction is important because it challenges the assumption that protection and restriction are necessarily forms of care.

The image of confinement and the imagery of chains are used consistently in the poem to illustrate the predicament of women. This condition is stated directly in the line, "If men keep women imprisoned," which presents women's confinement as a consequence of male control (Islam, 1925/2010). The use of these images elevates domestic captivity to a political and social issue. The captivity is not just seen as a personal or family issue but is linked to a larger social structure in which men control women's movements and activities.

The metaphor of incarceration brings another significant reversal to the text, as the poet contends that by imprisoning women, men actually end up creating conditions that work against themselves. A society that prevents women from exercising their abilities limits its own development (Islam, 1925/2010). Patriarchy is thus portrayed as

self-defeating. While the oppressor seems to have all the power, that power leads to the creation of a limited society where both individuals and society are restricted.

This argument makes it possible for "Nari" to go beyond simply describing the sufferings of women. The poem urges its audience to understand that the oppression of women has effects on the entire social structure. Gender discrimination, thus, becomes an institutional problem and not a personal one limited to the household.

5.4. Women's Contributions and Historical Erasure

The invisibility of women's efforts is another important issue that has been raised by the poem "Nari." It highlights the role played by women who have made sacrifices and contributions to the accomplishments of men without receiving recognition for those contributions (Islam, 1925/2010). Nazrul makes this absence of recognition explicit by asking, "Who has written their names upon the monuments raised to the memory of heroes?" (Islam, 1925/2010). This criticism exposes a different dimension of patriarchal power: women can be essential to social achievement while remaining absent from the historical record.

The problem of historical erasure has a lot to do with the poem's demand for equality. Recognition is not simply a formality. If the contributions of women are erased from collective memory, then future generations may continue to believe that social, political, and cultural achievements belong primarily to men. The erasing of women from history could thus perpetuate the very structure that the poem tries to overthrow.

Through repositioning women at the heart of the discourse, "Nari" contradicts the notion that women are relegated to a subservient position in civilization. The efforts, sacrifices, and creative abilities of women are presented as fundamental to the development of civilization (Khanom, 2001). The poem consequently links gender justice with the recognition of women's historical agency.

5.5. From Silence to Resistance

The poem becomes a call for resistance against oppression, where women are urged to break away from the societal structures that restrict them and reclaim their freedom (Islam, 1925/2010). This demand is expressed clearly in the declaration, "No one shall remain captive to another—the drum of change is sounding" (Islam, 1925/2010). Its forceful language reflects the poem's view that oppression is something that must be challenged and overcome rather than accepted.

The importance of action sets this poem apart from depictions of women that focus primarily on suffering. It is not just about women receiving liberation from men, but rather about women participating in their own liberation. In fact, resistance plays an important role in the development of agency. For this reason, the poet's call to break the metaphorical chains of restriction represents a movement from oppression towards resistance.

On the other hand, "Nari" must be examined in light of the period in which it was written rather than being categorized solely according to modern feminist definitions. The diction of the poem sometimes stresses cooperation between men and women rather than separation from male society. The main claim of the poem is not about reversing the existing hierarchy, but about eliminating gender hierarchy itself (Khanom, 2001).

The message is supported by the conclusion, where women and men's victories will be celebrated together rather than being pitted against each other (Islam, 1925/2010). Hence, equality is portrayed as a shared advancement of humanity. In the beginning of the poem, gender-based distinctions are rejected, while the effects of inequality, such as imprisonment and historical erasure, are mentioned. At the end of the poem, freedom and recognition are demanded. Thus, the poem "Nari" portrays the emancipation of women not only as an individual process but also as a social one. The relevance of this poem to the current study lies in its portrayal of women's confinement, resistance, and agency.

6. Comparative Discussion: *Othello*, "Nari," and Bangladesh

The comparison of *Othello* by William Shakespeare and "Nari" by Kazi Nazrul Islam provides insight into two contrasting literary approaches to the oppression of women. While *Othello* portrays how patriarchal beliefs can make love turn into distrust, manipulation, and abuse, "Nari" challenges gender inequality and calls for equal rights

for women. The texts differ considerably in historical context, genre, and purpose, yet both raise questions about women's autonomy within social and intimate relationships. These concerns can also be examined in relation to contemporary Bangladesh, where intimate partner violence, controlling behaviour, and unequal domestic responsibilities continue to affect women's lives (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS] & United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2025).

6.1. Marital Control and the Development of Violence

The process of marital control is gradual in *Othello*. At first, Othello marries Desdemona voluntarily, but after Iago casts doubt on her fidelity, Othello begins to view her through the lens of sexual infidelity. Iago gradually encourages him to interpret her behaviour as evidence of guilt. Thus, jealousy is not only an emotional state but also becomes a means of exercising control within the relationship. The demand for proof, represented by the handkerchief, allows suspicion to be treated as fact (Bell, 2002; Song, 2021).

The violence that ensues is related to the psychological manipulation that precedes it. Othello casts doubt on Desdemona's integrity, denies her the opportunity to establish her innocence, and finally assumes the authority to punish her himself. This progression shows how psychological control within the domestic relationship can develop into physical violence (Miller, 2020). The sexuality and reputation of Desdemona become issues that Othello believes it is his prerogative to judge, showing how patriarchal dominance becomes destructive when coupled with possessiveness and suspicion (Time, 2003).

The contemporary Bangladesh context provides an important point of comparison. The *Violence Against Women Survey 2024* reports that 75.9% of ever-married women experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence during their lifetime. Controlling behaviour was particularly widespread, affecting 67.6% of women over their lifetime, while emotional violence affected 37.4% (BBS & UNFPA, 2025). These numbers do not mean that Desdemona is an allegory for Bangladeshi women. Instead, they show that control within intimate relationships and its connection with violence remain relevant issues for comparison.

6.2. Domestic Confinement as a Form of Power

The concept of domestic confinement is another point of connection between the two literary works. In the case of *Othello*, Desdemona's freedom is gradually restricted as suspicion develops. Although her marriage initially represents personal autonomy, it gradually becomes a relationship in which her actions and sexual conduct are placed under continuous scrutiny by her husband.

"Nari" highlights this problem even more explicitly. In this poem, the author uses the imagery of imprisonment and chains to illustrate the limitations that women experience. Confinement does not have to be physical; it also includes social restrictions that limit women's actions and freedom of choice (Islam, 1925/2010). There is also a contradiction in patriarchal relations where a woman is loved but simultaneously controlled.

The Bangladesh context illustrates that domestic abuse does not necessarily have to come in the form of visible physical violence. The nationwide survey reveals that controlling behaviour is one of the most prevalent measured forms of intimate partner violence, indicating that domestic violence does not only include physical violence but also restrictive and coercive behaviour (BBS & UNFPA, 2025). Gendered norms in families influence women's autonomy as well, particularly through the distribution of unpaid domestic and caring work. Research on Bangladesh shows a substantial gender disparity in unpaid care work, with women carrying a significantly greater burden than men (Barford et al., 2024).

Unequal domestic work does not necessarily constitute intimate partner violence. However, it can help create conditions in which women do not have enough time, economic opportunities, and freedom to engage in activities outside the home. This makes "Nari" useful for examining confinement as a social phenomenon rather than just a physical one.

6.3. Equality and the Question of Agency

One of the important differences between *Othello* and "Nari" is the way they represent women's agency. In this case, Desdemona's resistance is largely reactive. She tries to defend herself and her marriage, but her voice gradually loses its strength because Othello has already begun to believe in her guilt. This tragedy highlights how vulnerable a woman can be when her position within an intimate relationship depends on her husband's judgment.

Emilia offers a more direct form of resistance. Her observation that wives possess "sense" like their husbands challenges the assumption that women should simply obey male authority (Neill, 2006, 4.3.87–90). Her decision not to stay silent during the last scene shows that resistance can emerge even within a patriarchal setting. However, since her own actions contributed to Desdemona's victimization, her actions cannot be viewed solely through the lens of a modern-day feminist heroine (Chakravarty, 2022).

However, "Nari" makes the presentation of female autonomy quite explicit. Instead of depicting women only as enduring oppression under patriarchy, the poem demands that women break free from the shackles of subordination and actively engage in their own liberation (Islam, 1925/2010). Equality is presented as a social principle, while women are portrayed as contributors to human civilization who deserve recognition for their accomplishments (Khanom, 2001). Thus, the difference is essential: *Othello* shows the destructive consequences of patriarchal control, while "Nari" directly rejects gender hierarchy and calls for women's equality and freedom.

6.4. Comparative Overview

The major similarities and differences can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Comparative Dimensions of Patriarchal Control, Women's Agency, and Contemporary Gender Concerns

Dimension	<i>Othello</i>	"Nari"	Contemporary Bangladesh
Central issue	Marital suspicion and control.	Gender inequality and confinement.	Intimate partner violence and gendered inequality.
Form of control	Jealousy, surveillance, accusations.	Social restrictions, confinement, patriarchal authority.	Controlling behaviour, emotional, physical, sexual, and economic violence.
Female position	Desdemona becomes increasingly silenced; Emilia eventually resists.	Women are presented as equal contributors and potential agents of change.	Women experience unequal power but also exercise agency through social and economic participation.
Domestic sphere	Becomes a site of suspicion and violence.	Critiqued as a possible site of confinement.	Important site of both care and gendered power relations.
Response to oppression	Limited resistance within tragedy.	Explicit call for equality and liberation.	Prevention, support, awareness, economic autonomy, and access to justice.
Main emphasis	Consequences of patriarchal control.	Rejection of gender hierarchy.	Reduction of violence and expansion of women's autonomy.

As the comparison shows, both texts cannot be treated as equivalents. *Othello* is a play that presents the effects of jealousy and inequality between husband and wife. "Nari" is a poem in which the poet directly criticizes the

existence of gender hierarchy. While Bangladesh provides a contemporary context in which similar questions can be examined, it cannot be regarded as an extension of either of the two texts.

6.5. Silence, Voice, and Disclosure

The correlation between silence and power can be examined more directly. When considering *Othello*, even though Desdemona speaks up in her own defense, her words lose their force since Othello already believes the tale of her wickedness. In this way, Emilia's decision to speak becomes particularly important.

"Nari" adopts a different perspective, presenting women's emancipation as a public and collective demand. The poem gives direct expression to various forms of confinement that patriarchal society seeks to normalize. It also challenges the historical omission of women's contributions by highlighting their roles in social and cultural accomplishments.

This issue has contemporary relevance in Bangladesh. The *Violence Against Women Survey 2024* found that many women who experienced violence did not disclose their experiences. Barriers to disclosure and help-seeking remain important concerns in addressing gender-based violence (BBS & UNFPA, 2025). Silence in this case cannot be equated with Desdemona's silence, as the context is entirely different. The point, however, draws attention to the general connection between voice and power: the ability to speak does not necessarily mean having the power to make one's words heard or acted upon.

6.6. Economic Autonomy and Women's Participation

The issue of agency also goes beyond intimate relations. The concept of "Nari" highlights women's involvement in the development of civilization and challenges their exclusion as second-class participants. This can be connected to the material conditions required for women's autonomy. Women's capacity for agency depends on factors such as income, education, employment, time, and social inclusion.

The context of Bangladesh helps highlight how significant these factors are. Women continue to perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care and household work, which can reduce their time and opportunities to engage in paid work and other activities (Barford et al., 2024). Economic engagement alone must not be seen as an ultimate remedy for addressing gender inequality. Being autonomous entails having access to resources, being able to move freely, make decisions, and seek help when experiencing violence.

This view broadens the interpretation of "Nari." The call for equality in the poem is not limited to symbolic recognition; rather, it is a call against the circumstances that inhibit women's full participation in society. This makes the poem's focus on women's contributions relevant to the relationship between domestic work, economic dependence, and autonomy.

6.7. Literary Representation and Contemporary Interpretation

Ultimately, the comparison reveals that literature may offer a means of approaching gender relations without serving as empirical data. *Othello* does not record acts of domestic violence in contemporary Bangladesh, and "Nari" is not a sociological account of Bangladeshi women. The value of these literary works lies in how they represent gender relations and structures of power.

Othello shows how marital trust can be transformed into suspicion, surveillance, isolation, and violence. "Nari" challenges the hierarchy that allows women to be confined and denied recognition. Contemporary Bangladesh provides evidence that controlling behaviour, intimate partner violence, and unequal domestic responsibilities remain important concerns (BBS & UNFPA, 2025; Barford et al., 2024).

Historical differences must, however, remain central to the comparison. The societies of Shakespearean England, Nazrul's Bengal, and contemporary Bangladesh are distinct in their legal, cultural, familial, and historical contexts. It is for this reason that the texts cannot be treated as proof of the timeless nature of patriarchal society. What can be compared are recurring patterns involving gender, power, restriction, and female agency.

These three contexts therefore offer different perspectives on related questions of gender and power. In *Othello*, the destructive effects of patriarchal control within marriage are revealed; in “Nari,” equality and the struggle against confinement are expressed as an explicit demand; and the present-day context of Bangladesh shows that gender-based control and violence remain socially relevant concerns. By bringing these contexts together, literary texts can contribute to the current discussion without being reduced to sociological examples. A useful comparison should account for both connection and difference: although the forms of domination vary across historical and social contexts, the literary concerns of control, confinement, voice, and agency provide a basis for examining restrictions on women’s independence.

7. Bangladesh Context and Contemporary Implications

The themes of women’s oppression, domestic control, and resistance examined in *Othello* and “Nari” remain relevant when considered alongside contemporary Bangladesh. The *Violence Against Women Survey 2024* indicates that intimate partner violence continues to be a serious concern. The survey reports that 75.9% of ever-married women experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence during their lifetime, while controlling behaviour affected 67.6% (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS] & United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2025). These findings provide a contemporary context for understanding the relationship between marital control and violence represented in *Othello*.

Inequality within the household and economic spheres also affects women’s autonomy. Women in Bangladesh perform substantially more unpaid domestic and caregiving work than men, which can limit their opportunities for paid employment and social participation (Barford et al., 2024). This concern also resonates with “Nari,” where women’s contributions are recognized and patriarchal restrictions are challenged (Islam, 1925/2010).

The contemporary implications of these findings include:

- **Greater awareness:** Awareness should address controlling behaviour and psychological violence, not only physical abuse.
- **Stronger support systems:** Women should have accessible counselling, legal assistance, reporting mechanisms, and survivor-support services.
- **Economic autonomy:** Expanding women’s access to employment, income, and skills development can strengthen their economic independence.
- **Shared domestic responsibility:** Reducing the unequal burden of unpaid care work can provide women with greater time for employment, education, and social participation.
- **Women’s decision-making power:** Families and institutions should support women’s freedom to make decisions and express their views without coercion.

These implications connect the literary concerns of control, confinement, equality, and resistance with practical questions of women’s autonomy in contemporary Bangladesh.

8. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the textual analysis of Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Kazi Nazrul Islam’s “Nari.” Contemporary Bangladesh is used only as a contextual dimension rather than as an empirical field of study. The analysis also relies on selected secondary sources (scholarly articles, books, and institutional reports) and does not include interviews or primary data from Bangladeshi women. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all women’s experiences.

9. Conclusion

This study has critically analyzed the play *Othello* by William Shakespeare and the poem “Nari” by Kazi Nazrul Islam by considering the issues of patriarchy, domestic confinement, violence, and women’s empowerment, with particular attention to contemporary Bangladesh. *Othello* reveals how jealousy and male power can turn marriage into suspicion, surveillance, mental anguish, and violence. On the other hand, “Nari” challenges gender inequality by recognizing women’s contributions and advocating equality, freedom, and liberation from confinement. The two texts therefore approach women’s oppression differently: *Othello* exposes the destructive consequences of patriarchal power within marriage, while “Nari” challenges the social structures that restrict women’s autonomy. The

case of Bangladesh also illustrates that the problems of control, intimate partner violence, unequal domestic responsibilities, and women's lack of freedom remain relevant today. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's England, Nazrul's Bengal, and contemporary Bangladesh have distinct histories and cultures; therefore, these literary texts should not be considered equivalent portrayals of women's lived experiences. Rather, the comparison of these two literary works and the contemporary context of Bangladesh shows that literature can provide a useful way to examine recurring questions of gender, power, confinement, and resistance. Future research could extend this comparative approach by examining other literary works alongside contemporary research on Bangladeshi women's lives and experiences.

Authors' Contribution

Sharif Ratul Hassan¹ conceptualized the study and developed the overall research idea and framework. He was also primarily responsible for writing, revising, formatting, and organizing the final manuscript. Sujan Chandra Das² reviewed the manuscript and identified grammatical errors, typographical errors, and other areas requiring correction. Kamrun Nahar Borna³ contributed to the analysis of William Shakespeare's *Othello*, with particular attention to women's oppression, patriarchal control, marital relationships, and related themes. Sumaiya Akter Eva⁴ prepared the Research Methodology section of the study. Jannatul Ferdous Rinti⁵ contributed to the analysis of Kazi Nazrul Islam's "Nari," focusing on gender equality, women's oppression, confinement, resistance, and female agency. Tanjina Binta Mahbub⁶ prepared the Abstract of the study. Saima Islam Roma⁷ contributed to the collection and checking of references and supported the verification of the sources used in the manuscript.

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