

Comparative Representation of Gender Relations in Novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawal El-Saadawi and Novel *Larung* by Ayu Utami

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Abstract

Literary representations of gender relations vary depending on the socio-cultural context in which the work is born, so cross-cultural comparative studies are important for understanding the diversity of gender relations patterns in different societies. This study aims to describe and compare the representation of gender relations in the novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawal El-Saadawi and the novel *Larung* by Ayu Utami. This study uses a descriptive qualitative design with a comparative textual analysis approach. The primary data source is the text of both novels, with the units of analysis being phrases, sentences, and dialogues that represent gender relations. Data were collected through close reading and documentation techniques, then analyzed using a feminist literary criticism framework through the stages of data reduction, categorization based on the form and domain of gender relations, and comparative textual interpretation. The results show that gender relations in the novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* are dominated by unequal relations supported by patriarchal family authority, domestic violence, and restrictions on access to education, whereas in the novel *Larung* gender relations tend towards an equal pattern characterized by critical awareness, bodily autonomy, and social independence. economics of female characters. This comparison shows that the representation of gender relations in literature is strongly influenced by the social, cultural, and ideological contexts of each society. This research contributes to feminist literary criticism and cross-cultural gender studies by offering a systematic comparative model of the representation of inequality, patriarchal legitimacy, and female resistance in two different literary and cultural traditions.

Keywords : Gender relations; Comparative literature; Women's resistance; Textual analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Literature represents more than an artistic expression; it functions as a cultural artifact that records, reflects, and critiques social realities. Through narrative structures, characters, and symbolic representations, literary works provide a space for authors to express experiences, social concerns, and ideological perspectives. As a reflection of social and cultural life, literature often reveals tensions within society, including issues related to identity, power, inequality, and human relationships (Ariani & Sulistyorini, 2025). Among various social issues represented in literary texts, gender relations have become one of the most significant areas of discussion because literature frequently portrays how societies construct, regulate, and negotiate the roles of men and women. The emergence of female writers has further strengthened this discourse by presenting women's experiences, struggles, and aspirations while challenging dominant narratives regarding femininity and women's social positions (Kusuma, 2023).

The novel, as one of the most influential literary genres, provides a particularly rich medium for examining social relations because it combines fictional narratives with representations of real social experiences. Although novels are imaginative constructions, their narratives are often influenced by the historical, cultural, and ideological environments in which they are produced (Febrianti et al., 2023). Through characters and conflicts, novels can reproduce existing social structures or challenge dominant assumptions about social order. One recurring issue in literary studies is gender, which refers not only to biological differences but also to socially constructed expectations, roles, and behaviors assigned to men and women. Gender construction is shaped by multiple social institutions, including family systems, education, religion, culture, and political structures (Nensilanti et al., 2025). When these constructions create unequal access to power, resources, and opportunities, gender inequality emerges as a central social problem frequently represented in literary works (Darlis et al., 2021).

The analysis of gender representation in literature is closely connected with feminist literary criticism, which examines how literary texts reflect, reinforce, or challenge patriarchal ideologies. Feminist literary criticism seeks to uncover mechanisms of domination that position women as subordinate through social norms, cultural expectations, and institutional practices that are often perceived as natural or legitimate (Wardhani & Febria, 2025). This perspective allows researchers to analyze not only explicit forms of oppression but also subtle representations of power relations, including control over women's education, bodies, identities, and participation in public spaces. Therefore, feminist literary criticism provides an appropriate analytical framework for understanding how gender relations are constructed within literary narratives and how female characters respond to systems of inequality.

However, gender relations are not constructed in identical ways across societies because they are strongly influenced by specific historical and socio-cultural contexts (Novriski & Sunahrowi, 2026; Agustina & Sakinah, 2026). Literary representations of gender must therefore be examined within the cultural environment from which they emerge. This issue becomes particularly significant when comparing literary works from different cultural traditions. The novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawal El-Saadawi represents gender relations within the context of Egyptian society, where patriarchal authority is portrayed through family structures, religious interpretation, and social restrictions. Through the character of Firdaus, the novel illustrates how women's limited access to education, domestic violence, and ideological justification of male authority interact to produce systematic inequality. The narrative reveals how patriarchal structures operate through multiple social institutions that restrict women's autonomy and opportunities.

In contrast, Ayu Utami's novel *Larung* presents gender relations within the context of contemporary urban Indonesian society, where female characters experience greater opportunities to access education, social participation, and personal autonomy. Through characters such as Yasmin, Cok, and Shakuntala, the novel portrays women's critical awareness of patriarchal values and their efforts to negotiate identity, sexuality, and bodily autonomy. Rather than depicting women solely as victims of oppression, *Larung* presents female characters who actively question, resist, and redefine traditional gender expectations. The contrast between these two novels provides an important opportunity to examine how different cultural contexts shape the representation of gender relations (Anis et al., 2026; Pakpahan et al., 2026). Both works address issues of patriarchy, women's roles, inequality, and resistance, but they construct these issues through different social, historical, and ideological frameworks.

Previous studies have explored gender issues in literary works, particularly through feminist literary criticism; however, most studies have focused on individual novels or a

single cultural context. Mukhibun and Wardani (2023), for example, examined gender inequality in Buya Hamka's *Tersingkir* and found that female characters were positioned within patriarchal structures that restricted their roles to domestic spaces. Similarly, Zulfikar and Qomariyah (2026) analyzed gender role deconstruction in Maman Suherman's *Re: dan Perempuan* and demonstrated the presence of women's suffering, resistance, and identity negotiation. Other studies have investigated gender inequality and feminist perspectives in novels such as *Kupu-Kupu Malam* (Susanti, 2013), *Cantik Itu Luka* (Febrianti et al., 2023), *Merpati Tak Pernah Ingkar Janji* (Ariani & Sulistyorini, 2025), and *Genduk Duku* (Wardhani & Febria, 2025). Although these studies provide important insights into gender representation, they primarily examine Indonesian literary works individually and do not explore how gender relations are represented across different cultural traditions.

Furthermore, several studies have discussed feminist perspectives and power relations in literary discourse (Darlis et al., 2021; Kusuma, 2023; Nensilanti et al., 2025), yet they have not systematically compared how patriarchal structures and gender equality tendencies are constructed in different socio-cultural environments. As a result, there remains a need for comparative literary research that examines how gender relations are represented across cultural boundaries. A cross-cultural comparison is important because it avoids viewing gender inequality or women's resistance as universal phenomena with identical characteristics. Instead, it highlights how factors such as religion, family authority, education, economic independence, and social mobility influence the formation of gender relations within specific contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative analysis of gender relations represented in two novels originating from different cultural traditions: Egypt and Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that mainly analyze gender inequality or women's resistance within a single literary work, this study provides a systematic comparison of unequal relations, patriarchal legitimacy, educational access, bodily autonomy, women's independence, and identity negotiation across two different socio-cultural contexts. Through this comparative framework, the study contributes to feminist literary criticism by demonstrating how similar patriarchal structures may produce different forms of oppression and resistance depending on cultural, social, and historical conditions.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze and compare the representation of gender relations in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Perempuan di Titik Nol* and Ayu Utami's *Larung*. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the forms of gender relations represented in each novel and explain how differences in socio-cultural contexts influence the construction of patriarchy and gender equality. Therefore, the research addresses the following questions:

How are gender relations represented in Nawal El-Saadawi's novel Perempuan di Titik Nol and what forms of patriarchal structures and gender inequality are revealed through the narrative?

How are gender relations represented in Ayu Utami's novel Larung, and how does the comparison between the two novels illustrate differences in patriarchal construction, women's resistance, and tendencies toward gender equality across Egyptian and Indonesian socio-cultural contexts?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design with a comparative textual analysis approach to examine the representation of gender relations in two literary works: *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawal El-Saadawi and *Larung* by Ayu Utami. A qualitative design was selected because the research aimed to interpret meanings, social constructions, and ideological representations embedded within literary texts rather than

measure relationships between variables quantitatively. Through qualitative interpretation, the study explored how gender relations are constructed, negotiated, and represented through characters, narratives, and dialogues within different socio-cultural contexts.

The comparative textual analysis approach was applied to identify similarities and differences in the representation of gender relations between the two novels. This approach enabled the researchers to examine how patriarchal structures, women's positions, resistance strategies, and forms of equality are narrated within Egyptian and Indonesian cultural contexts. The theoretical foundation of the analysis was feminist literary criticism, which views literary texts as representations of social power relations between men and women and provides a framework for examining gender inequality, domination, resistance, and identity negotiation. The research did not aim to generalize social conditions of Egypt or Indonesia as a whole but focused on understanding how gender relations are represented within the specific literary contexts created by the authors. The design allowed a deeper exploration of how literature reflects cultural values, ideological assumptions, and social experiences related to gender.

Data Sources

The primary data sources in this study were the complete texts of two novels: *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawal El-Saadawi and *Larung* by Ayu Utami. These novels were selected because both represent significant discussions of gender relations, particularly regarding women's social positions, patriarchal structures, resistance, autonomy, and identity formation. The selection of these literary works enabled a comparative examination of gender representations across two different socio-cultural contexts, namely Egyptian society as represented in El-Saadawi's novel and Indonesian urban society as represented in Utami's novel.

The units of analysis consisted of textual elements in the form of phrases, sentences, and dialogues that explicitly or implicitly represented gender relations between male and female characters. These textual units were examined to identify patterns of inequality, patriarchal authority, women's resistance, educational access, bodily autonomy, and negotiation of gender identity. The use of literary texts as data sources was based on the assumption that novels function not only as fictional narratives but also as cultural products that reflect social experiences, ideological perspectives, and historical conditions. Therefore, the selected novels were analyzed as narrative constructions that reveal how gender relations are imagined, questioned, and represented by authors within particular social and cultural environments. The comparative use of two novels allowed the study to identify contextual differences in the construction of gender relations rather than treating gender representation as a universal phenomenon.

Instruments and Data Collection

In this qualitative literary study, the main research instrument was the researcher herself, supported by documentation note sheets used to organize and record relevant textual evidence. The researcher functioned as the primary instrument because qualitative textual analysis requires interpretative ability to identify meanings, classify patterns, and understand the relationship between textual representations and theoretical concepts. Data collection was conducted through two complementary techniques: close reading and documentation. Close reading was performed by reading both novels comprehensively to understand the overall storyline, characterization, narrative structure, and socio-cultural context represented in each literary work. This process enabled the researcher to develop an integrated understanding of how gender relations were constructed throughout the narratives.

The documentation technique involved recording and organizing relevant textual evidence, including phrases, sentences, and dialogues that reflected gender relations. The collected data were documented according to their relevance to the research focus, such as unequal relationships, patriarchal authority, domestic violence, religious legitimacy, educational access, bodily autonomy, and women's identity negotiation. Through systematic reading and documentation, the researcher collected textual evidence that represented different forms of gender relations in both novels. These procedures ensured that interpretations were based on identifiable textual data rather than subjective impressions. The combination of close reading and documentation provided a systematic foundation for subsequent feminist literary analysis and cross-textual comparison.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through four sequential stages: data reduction, categorization, textual interpretation, and comparative analysis. First, data reduction was conducted by selecting and organizing textual excerpts that directly represented gender relations. At this stage, irrelevant textual information was excluded, while meaningful phrases, sentences, and dialogues related to gender issues were retained for further analysis.

Second, the selected data were categorized based on the forms and domains of gender relations represented in the novels. The categorization included patterns of equal and unequal relationships and the specific domains in which gender relations appeared, such as educational access, domestic violence, religious legitimacy, family authority, bodily autonomy, and identity negotiation. Third, the categorized data were interpreted using a feminist literary criticism framework. This analysis examined how patriarchal ideology, power relations, and gender constructions were represented through characters, events, and narrative perspectives. The interpretation focused on understanding how women's positions were shaped by social structures and how resistance or negotiation emerged within each novel.

Finally, comparative textual analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences between the two novels. The comparison examined how gender relations were constructed within different cultural contexts and how factors such as family authority, education, religion, social independence, and bodily autonomy influenced representations of gender equality or inequality. This analytical procedure enabled the study to move beyond description by providing an interpretative explanation of how literary texts reproduce, challenge, or negotiate gender ideologies across different cultural settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

How are gender relations represented in Nawal El-Saadawi's novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, and what forms of patriarchal structures and gender inequality are revealed through the narrative?

The textual analysis of *Perempuan di Titik Nol* reveals that gender relations are predominantly represented as unequal relationships characterized by patriarchal domination and women's subordination. The representation of gender inequality appears through four major domains: restricted access to education, domestic violence, religious legitimacy of male authority, and patriarchal family structures. Through the character of Firdaus, El-Saadawi portrays how women's social position is systematically controlled by patriarchal institutions beginning from childhood and continuing into adulthood.

The first representation of inequality is found in the limitation of women's educational opportunities. Firdaus's aspiration to pursue higher education is rejected

because education is constructed as a male privilege rather than a universal right. This representation demonstrates how patriarchal ideology operates by controlling women's access to knowledge and social mobility. Education becomes an instrument of power because restricting women's knowledge limits their ability to challenge existing social structures.

The second form of inequality is represented through domestic violence within marriage. Firdaus experiences physical and psychological violence from her husband, demonstrating how women's bodies are positioned as objects controlled by male authority. The violence is not represented as an individual conflict but as a consequence of unequal power relations between men and women.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates how religious discourse can be used as a mechanism for legitimizing patriarchal authority. Violence against women is normalized through interpretations that reinforce male dominance. Thus, patriarchy in the novel operates through interconnected systems involving family authority, marriage, religion, and social norms. The findings indicate that gender inequality in *Perempuan di Titik Nol* is not an isolated event but a structural condition produced by cultural and institutional power relations.

Table 1. Representation of Gender Relations in *Perempuan di Titik Nol*

Domain of Gender Relations	Textual Representation	Form of Relationship	Interpretation
Education	Firdaus is denied access to higher education because she is a woman	Unequal	Education is constructed as a male privilege
Family authority	Male family members control decisions affecting women's lives	Unequal	Men occupy dominant positions within family structures
Marriage and violence	Firdaus experiences physical violence from her husband	Unequal	Women's bodies become objects of male control
Religious legitimacy	Violence is justified through patriarchal interpretations of religion	Unequal	Religious discourse reinforces male authority

The first chart illustrates that gender relations represented in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Perempuan di Titik Nol* are predominantly characterized by unequal relationships resulting from the operation of patriarchal structures. The four identified domains—education, family authority, marriage and violence, and religious legitimacy—demonstrate that women's subordination in the novel is not produced by a single factor but by interconnected social institutions. The representation of Firdaus's life shows how patriarchal power operates systematically from childhood to adulthood, limiting women's opportunities and autonomy. In the domain of education, the chart shows that Firdaus's exclusion from higher education represents a form of structural inequality. Education is portrayed as a privilege associated with men, while women are positioned as unsuitable recipients of advanced knowledge. This representation indicates that restricting women's access to education functions as a mechanism for maintaining male dominance because knowledge provides individuals with the ability to question and challenge existing social arrangements.

The second domain, family authority, demonstrates that patriarchal power begins within the domestic structure. Male family members are represented as possessing decision-making authority, while women have limited control over choices affecting

their own lives. The family becomes the first institution through which gender hierarchy is introduced and normalized. This finding suggests that patriarchy is not only maintained through public institutions but is also reproduced through everyday family relationships.

The representation of marriage and domestic violence further strengthens the pattern of inequality. Firdaus's relationship with her husband illustrates how women's bodies are controlled through unequal marital power relations. Violence is not presented merely as individual behavior but as a consequence of a social system that grants men authority over women. In addition, the religious justification of violence reveals how patriarchal interpretations may function as ideological tools to legitimize male domination.

How are gender relations represented in Ayu Utami's novel *Larung*, and how does the comparison between the two novels illustrate differences in patriarchal construction, women's resistance, and tendencies toward gender equality across Egyptian and Indonesian socio-cultural contexts?

The analysis of *Larung* demonstrates a different pattern of gender relations compared with *Perempuan di Titik Nol*. Gender relations in this novel tend toward a more equal relationship, characterized by women's critical awareness, independence, bodily autonomy, and negotiation of identity. Through female characters such as Yasmin, Cok, and Shakuntala, Ayu Utami presents women who actively question patriarchal values rather than merely becoming victims of social domination.

One significant representation is women's awareness of patriarchal construction. The characters recognize how social systems position women as subordinate or as objects of male desire. However, unlike Firdaus in *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, these characters possess greater opportunities to reflect on and challenge these structures. Awareness becomes the initial stage of resistance because women are able to identify and criticize the cultural assumptions that restrict them. The second representation is related to educational and social independence. Female characters in *Larung* demonstrate greater access to education, economic resources, and public spaces. These conditions provide women with stronger bargaining positions in relationships with men. Education and social participation function as mechanisms that support women's autonomy.

The novel also emphasizes bodily autonomy and identity negotiation. Through characters such as Cok and Shakuntala, *Larung* challenges conventional assumptions about female sexuality and fixed gender categories. Women are represented as individuals with the ability to make decisions regarding their bodies, identities, and life choices. Therefore, *Larung* does not eliminate the existence of patriarchy but represents a context where women have greater resources to negotiate and resist patriarchal expectations. The findings show that gender equality is strongly influenced by social conditions, including education, economic independence, and access to public space.

Table 2. Representation of Gender Relations in *Larung*

Domain of Gender Relations	Textual Representation	Form of Relationship	Interpretation
Patriarchal awareness	Female characters recognize and criticize patriarchal values	Relatively equal	Awareness becomes a form of resistance
Education and social independence	Women have access to education and public spaces	Equal tendency	Knowledge strengthens women's autonomy
Bodily autonomy	Women negotiate sexuality and control over their bodies	Equal tendency	Women possess agency over personal choices
Gender identity	Shakuntala challenges fixed gender categories	Equal tendency	Identity is represented as fluid and negotiable

Table 2 presents a contrasting representation of gender relations in Ayu Utami's *Larung*. Unlike *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, where women are primarily positioned within structures of domination, *Larung* represents gender relations through a tendency toward equality characterized by women's awareness, independence, bodily autonomy, and identity negotiation. The findings indicate that female characters in this novel are not merely passive subjects affected by patriarchy but active individuals who critically examine and negotiate their positions within society.

The first domain, patriarchal awareness, demonstrates that equality begins with the recognition of unequal social structures. Through characters such as Yasmin, the novel portrays women who understand how patriarchal values influence perceptions of femininity and women's roles. This awareness allows female characters to question traditional assumptions that define women as dependent or subordinate. Therefore, critical consciousness becomes a form of resistance because it enables women to challenge internalized patriarchal norms. The second domain, education and social independence, highlights the relationship between access to knowledge and women's empowerment. Female characters in *Larung* are represented as having opportunities to participate in educational and social spaces. These opportunities provide women with greater independence and stronger positions in negotiating relationships with men. Unlike Firdaus's experience in *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, where restricted education reinforces inequality, education in *Larung* functions as a resource that supports women's autonomy.

The third domain, bodily autonomy, shows that gender equality in the novel is also related to women's control over their own bodies and personal choices. Through Cok's character, the novel challenges traditional expectations regarding female sexuality and demonstrates that women possess agency over their identities and experiences. This representation expands the discussion of gender equality beyond access to social institutions by including personal freedom and self-determination. The final domain, gender identity negotiation, is represented through Shakuntala's character, who challenges fixed assumptions regarding masculine and feminine categories. The novel presents identity as something that can be negotiated rather than determined entirely by traditional social expectations. This representation suggests that gender relations involve not only power between men and women but also broader questions regarding identity, subjectivity, and social recognition.

Comparison between *Perempuan di Titik Nol* and *Larung*

The comparison between *Perempuan di Titik Nol* and *Larung* demonstrates that gender relations are socially and culturally constructed rather than universal. Both novels discuss patriarchy and women's positions, but they represent different mechanisms and consequences of gender relations. In *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, patriarchy operates through strong institutional control involving family authority, religious interpretation, marriage, and restrictions on education. Women's oppression is represented as systematic because multiple social structures work together to limit female autonomy. Meanwhile, *Larung* represents a context where women have greater access to education, economic resources, and public participation. Although patriarchal values remain present, female characters possess greater capacity to negotiate identity, challenge social expectations, and claim autonomy.

The comparative analysis indicates that differences in gender relations are influenced by socio-cultural conditions rather than simply by individual attitudes. The representation of inequality in El-Saadawi's novel reflects a context where patriarchal authority dominates women's lives, whereas Utami's novel illustrates a context where

women's agency has developed through increased social opportunities. These findings extend previous literary studies by demonstrating that gender inequality and resistance should be examined through comparative cultural perspectives rather than within a single literary context.

Table 3. Comparative Representation of Gender Relations

Aspect of Comparison	<i>Perempuan di Titik Nol</i> (Nawal El-Saadawi)	<i>Larung</i> (Ayu Utami)
Dominant pattern	Gender inequality	Equality tendency
Main mechanism	Patriarchal family authority, religion, marriage	Negotiation, awareness, education, independence
Women's position	Subordinated and controlled	Autonomous and resistant
Education	Restricted access	Source of empowerment
Body and sexuality	Controlled by male authority	Negotiated through personal autonomy
Identity	Limited by social expectations	Constructed as flexible and negotiable
Main interpretation	Patriarchy as a system of domination	Resistance and negotiation within patriarchal structures

Table 3 provides a comparative interpretation of gender relations between the two novels and demonstrates that gender representation is strongly influenced by socio-cultural contexts. Although both novels discuss women's experiences within patriarchal societies, they present different patterns of domination, resistance, and agency. The comparison reveals that gender inequality and gender equality are not fixed conditions but are shaped by factors such as family structures, education, religion, economic independence, and access to public spaces. The dominant pattern in *Perempuan di Titik Nol* is characterized by inequality, where patriarchal authority controls women's lives through multiple mechanisms. The novel illustrates a social environment where women have limited opportunities to challenge male dominance because patriarchal values are reinforced by family traditions, religious interpretations, and marital structures. Women's experiences are therefore represented through restriction, vulnerability, and loss of autonomy.

In contrast, *Larung* presents a tendency toward equality because female characters possess greater resources to negotiate their positions. Access to education, economic independence, and social participation provides women with stronger agency. However, the novel does not suggest that patriarchy has disappeared; rather, it shows that women have developed strategies to question and resist patriarchal expectations. The difference in educational representation between the two novels is particularly significant. In *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, limited educational access becomes a mechanism of oppression, whereas in *Larung*, education functions as a pathway toward independence. This contrast demonstrates that education plays a central role in shaping women's capacity to participate in social life and challenge unequal relationships.

Similarly, the representation of women's bodies and identities differs significantly. Firdaus's body is portrayed as controlled by male authority, while female characters in *Larung* negotiate bodily autonomy and personal identity. These differences indicate that women's agency is closely connected to the social and cultural opportunities available within their environments. Therefore, Table 3 confirms the central argument of the study that literary representations of gender relations must be interpreted within their specific cultural contexts. The comparison between the two novels extends previous feminist literary studies by showing that similar patriarchal structures may generate different experiences of oppression and resistance depending on historical, cultural, and social conditions.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that gender relations in literary texts are strongly shaped by the socio-cultural contexts represented by the authors. The comparative analysis between *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawal El-Saadawi and *Larung* by Ayu Utami demonstrates two contrasting patterns of gender relations: systematic inequality produced by patriarchal domination and a tendency toward equality characterized by women's awareness, autonomy, and resistance. These findings confirm the argument that literature functions not merely as fictional entertainment but as a cultural representation through which social structures, power relations, and ideological assumptions are expressed (Ariani & Sulistyorini, 2025). Through characters, conflicts, and narrative perspectives, both novels reveal how gender roles are socially constructed and negotiated within different cultural environments.

The representation of gender relations in *Perempuan di Titik Nol* confirms previous feminist literary studies that identify patriarchy as a system operating through multiple social institutions rather than through individual actions alone. The findings show that Firdaus's experience of inequality is constructed through four interconnected domains: restricted educational access, patriarchal family authority, domestic violence, and religious legitimacy of male domination. This finding is consistent with Mukhibun and Wardani (2023), who found that female characters in *Tersingkir* were positioned within patriarchal structures that limited women's roles to domestic spaces. Similar patterns were also identified by Susanti (2013), Febrianti et al. (2023), and Wardhani and Febria (2025), who demonstrated that female characters in Indonesian literary works frequently experience marginalization due to patriarchal norms.

However, the present study extends these previous findings by demonstrating that women's subordination may involve not only family and domestic structures but also ideological systems that legitimize inequality. In *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, religious interpretation is represented as a mechanism that strengthens male authority by providing justification for violence and control over women's lives. This finding adds complexity to previous feminist literary analyses because it shows that patriarchal power is maintained through the interaction between social institutions, cultural beliefs, and ideological narratives. Thus, the oppression experienced by Firdaus cannot be interpreted merely as personal suffering but as a representation of structural inequality.

The role of education emerges as a significant finding in understanding gender inequality in *Perempuan di Titik Nol*. The rejection of Firdaus's desire to pursue higher education illustrates how access to knowledge becomes a site of gender struggle. The novel represents education as a privilege controlled by patriarchal authority, where women are excluded from opportunities that could enhance independence and social mobility. This finding supports the argument of Nensilanti et al. (2025) that gender construction is influenced by social institutions such as education, family, religion, and political structures. The current study further emphasizes that educational restrictions do not merely limit individual achievement but function as mechanisms that preserve unequal gender relations.

The findings regarding domestic violence further strengthen the understanding of patriarchy as a relational and institutional phenomenon. Firdaus's experience demonstrates that violence against women is represented not as an isolated interpersonal conflict but as a consequence of unequal power relations between men and women. This interpretation aligns with feminist literary criticism, which views control over women's bodies as one of the central expressions of patriarchal domination (Wardhani & Febria, 2025). Compared with previous studies that primarily examined women's

marginalization within domestic spaces, this study contributes by showing how domestic violence is reinforced through broader cultural and ideological structures.

In contrast, the representation of gender relations in *Larung* demonstrates a different trajectory. The findings indicate that female characters such as Yasmin, Cok, and Shakuntala are represented as individuals who actively negotiate their positions within patriarchal environments rather than simply experiencing oppression. The novel presents gender relations through critical awareness, educational independence, bodily autonomy, and identity negotiation. This finding confirms Zulfikar and Qomariyah (2026), who identified women's resistance and identity negotiation in literary texts. However, the present study extends their findings by showing that resistance is strongly influenced by the availability of social resources, particularly education, economic independence, and access to public spaces.

One significant contribution of this study is the finding that awareness becomes an essential foundation for women's resistance. In *Larung*, female characters recognize how patriarchal values construct women as dependent or as objects of male desire. However, unlike Firdaus, these characters possess greater opportunities to question and negotiate these structures. This finding expands previous feminist literary research by suggesting that resistance is not only determined by the existence of oppression but also by women's capacity to recognize, interpret, and challenge oppressive structures (Addai-Amoah & Sebesho, 2026; Hussain & Zhara, 2026).

The findings also highlight the importance of education and social independence in shaping gender equality. In *Larung*, access to education and public spaces provides female characters with stronger positions in negotiating relationships with men. Education functions not only as a personal achievement but also as a resource that enables women to exercise autonomy. This finding supports broader feminist perspectives that consider knowledge and social participation as important foundations for women's empowerment (Sari et al., 2026; Addai-Amoah & Sebesho, 2026). Compared with *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, where restricted education reinforces inequality, *Larung* presents education as a pathway toward greater agency.

Another important finding concerns bodily autonomy and gender identity. Through characters such as Cok and Shakuntala, *Larung* challenges conventional assumptions regarding female sexuality and fixed gender categories. Women are represented as individuals capable of making decisions regarding their bodies, identities, and personal choices. This extends previous literary studies that commonly focus on gender inequality by incorporating broader dimensions of identity, subjectivity, and personal agency. The representation of Shakuntala particularly demonstrates that gender identity can be understood as dynamic and negotiated rather than determined solely by traditional binary categories.

The comparative findings demonstrate that patriarchy does not produce identical consequences across cultural contexts. In *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, patriarchy operates through strong control over women's education, family position, marriage, and bodily autonomy. Meanwhile, in *Larung*, patriarchal values remain present but are challenged through women's education, independence, and critical consciousness. This comparison confirms that gender relations are influenced by the intersection of cultural norms, social class, economic opportunities, and historical conditions. Therefore, the differences between the two novels should not be interpreted as a simple comparison between "oppressive" and "equal" societies, but rather as different literary representations of how gender relations are constructed within specific contexts.

This study also contributes theoretically by extending previous research that mainly examines gender inequality or women's resistance within a single literary work. The comparative framework employed in this research reveals that similar patriarchal

mechanisms may generate different forms of oppression and resistance depending on cultural conditions. The findings demonstrate that family authority, religion, education, economic independence, and public participation are key factors influencing how women experience and negotiate gender relations.

From a broader perspective, the findings have implications for comparative literary studies and gender-sensitive education. The comparison of these novels provides valuable material for developing critical reading practices that encourage students to examine gender constructions, power relations, and cultural differences represented in literary texts. Both novels demonstrate that literature can serve as a medium for understanding social inequalities and imagining alternative forms of gender relations. Overall, this study confirms that gender representation in literature is inseparable from the social and cultural environments in which literary works are produced. *Perempuan di Titik Nol* and *Larung* present different narratives of women's experiences, but both contribute to understanding how patriarchy operates and how resistance emerges. The comparative analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of gender relations by demonstrating that women's oppression and empowerment are shaped by complex interactions among cultural values, institutional structures, and individual agency.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that gender relations represented in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Perempuan di Titik Nol* and Ayu Utami's *Larung* demonstrate two different patterns of gender construction influenced by distinct socio-cultural contexts. In *Perempuan di Titik Nol*, gender relations are predominantly represented as unequal relationships characterized by patriarchal domination. The analysis shows that women's subordination operates systematically through restricted access to education, patriarchal family authority, domestic violence, and religious legitimacy of male control. Firdaus's experiences illustrate how patriarchal structures regulate women's opportunities, bodies, and social positions from childhood to adulthood. In contrast, *Larung* represents a tendency toward more equal gender relations through female characters' critical awareness, educational and social independence, bodily autonomy, and negotiation of gender identity. These findings demonstrate that gender equality is not an absolute condition but is influenced by social resources, cultural values, and opportunities available to women.

The study contributes to feminist literary criticism and comparative gender studies by providing a cross-cultural framework for understanding how patriarchal structures and women's resistance are represented in different literary traditions. Unlike previous studies that generally analyze gender inequality or resistance within a single novel, this research compares two literary contexts and demonstrates how similar patriarchal mechanisms may produce different forms of oppression and negotiation. The findings emphasize that family authority, education, religion, marriage, violence, and access to public spaces operate differently depending on socio-cultural conditions. However, the representations identified in these novels should be understood as narrative constructions within specific literary contexts rather than generalizations about Egyptian or Indonesian society as a whole. Future studies may expand this comparative approach by examining additional literary works from different cultural backgrounds to develop a broader understanding of gender representation and women's resistance in global literature.

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Declaration of Using AI Tools

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including ChatGPT, to assist with language improvement, grammatical refinement, academic phrasing, and manuscript organization. The AI tools were used only as writing-support instruments and did not contribute to the research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or formulation of scientific conclusions. All AI-assisted outputs were critically reviewed, verified, and revised by the authors to ensure accuracy, originality, academic integrity, and consistency with the objectives of the study. The authors remain fully responsible for the content, arguments, interpretations, and final version of this manuscript.

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