

Motherhood, Duty, and Obedience: A Feminist Deconstruction of Patriarchal Constructs in Postcolonial Fiction

1. Naima Tassadiq, Lecturer English (Visiting)
Department of Linguistics, University of Sargodha
naimatassadiq01@gmail.com
2. Sadia Sarwar, Lecturer English
Department of English, Lahore Garrison University,
sadiasarwar046@gmail.com
3. Sania Zehra, BS English Scholar
Department of English, University of Education, Lahore (Attock Campus)
zehra989shah@gmail.com
4. Muhammad Rizwan, Lecturer English
Department of English Literature, Riphah International University, Lahore
hafizrizwan158@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Rizwan

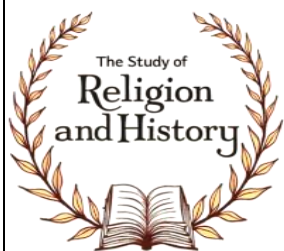
Abstract

This study explores the intertwined themes of motherhood, duty, and obedience as instruments of patriarchal control in postcolonial fiction. Through a feminist deconstructive reading of *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, this paper investigates how female identities are shaped and silenced under intersecting forces of colonial legacy, religion, culture, and gender politics. Drawing upon feminist theories by Simone de Beauvoir, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Judith Butler, the study examines how the social constructs of motherhood and obedience reinforce the subjugation of women while simultaneously offering subtle forms of resistance. The research argues that these authors challenge patriarchal ideologies by exposing the contradictions within cultural definitions of female virtue and duty. Using qualitative textual and thematic analysis, this work contributes to feminist literary criticism by revealing how postcolonial narratives reclaim silenced voices and redefine motherhood as a site of agency rather than submission. The findings underscore the transformative potential of feminist deconstruction in dismantling patriarchal narratives embedded in cultural and literary discourses.

Keywords: feminist deconstruction, postcolonial fiction, motherhood, patriarchy, female agency, obedience

Introduction

Postcolonial literature serves as a powerful site for interrogating the entangled dynamics of power, identity, and resistance. Within this discourse, the female body and voice often become contested terrains through which both colonial and patriarchal ideologies are reproduced and resisted. In the wake of decolonization, writers from formerly colonized nations have sought to uncover the lingering residues of imperial domination and the gendered hierarchies that persist in postcolonial societies. Feminist critics, therefore, have emphasized that liberation from



THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

Vol.4 No.1 2026

ISSN P : [3006-3329](#)

ISSN E : [3006-3337](#)

colonialism remains incomplete without the emancipation of women from patriarchal structures deeply embedded in culture, religion, and family. This study positions itself within this intersection of postcolonial and feminist theory, examining how motherhood, duty, and obedience, traditionally glorified as feminine virtues are, in fact, mechanisms through which patriarchal authority sustains itself in postcolonial contexts.

The postcolonial woman is doubly colonized; first by the empire and then by the indigenous patriarchy (Spivak, 1988). In many postcolonial societies, women are expected to embody cultural purity and moral virtue, becoming the repositories of collective identity. The rhetoric of nationalism often relies on the idealized image of the obedient mother or dutiful wife who upholds cultural continuity. However, beneath this veneration lies subjugation: women are confined within the domestic sphere, their value defined in relation to men and their roles in reproduction. Feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Judith Butler (1990) have argued that gender roles are social constructions, performed and internalized through repetition and cultural reinforcement. This theoretical insight allows for the deconstruction of motherhood and obedience as ideological constructs that mask the oppression of women under the guise of virtue.

Postcolonial fiction becomes a vital medium through which these contradictions are explored. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) depict women's struggles to define themselves within societies governed by patriarchal norms and religious conservatism. Each novel portrays women caught between personal desires and social expectations, revealing how duty and obedience often operate as tools of subjugation. At the same time, these works illustrate how women negotiate spaces of resistance, reclaiming their voices through acts of defiance, solidarity, and self-definition.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy deconstructs the sanctity of family and caste structures, presenting women like Ammu who transgress social codes by asserting her sexual and emotional autonomy. Her defiance of patriarchal rules leads to societal ostracization, demonstrating how motherhood and female desire become regulated by patriarchal morality. Similarly, *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie revisits *Antigone's* classical theme of loyalty and obedience through a modern Muslim diasporic lens. The female protagonist, Aneeka, challenges patriarchal and political authority by prioritizing familial love and moral conviction over state law, thus subverting the expected obedience of women within patriarchal and nationalist frameworks. Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* presents perhaps the most overt critique of patriarchal violence, illustrating how Afghan women like Mariam and Laila endure and ultimately resist oppressive gender norms justified by religion and tradition.

Background Study

The theoretical foundations of this study lie in feminist and postcolonial discourses that critique intersecting systems of domination. Feminist deconstruction, inspired by Derrida's notion of destabilizing binary oppositions, enables scholars to dismantle the ideological underpinnings of

concepts such as motherhood, duty, and obedience. Within postcolonial contexts, these constructs often emerge as hybrid forms infused with colonial morality and indigenous patriarchy. Writers like Roy, Shamsie, and Hosseini articulate this intersectionality by revealing how women navigate between tradition and modernity, public and private life, faith and freedom. Moreover, postcolonial feminism, as articulated by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), critiques Western feminism's tendency to universalize women's oppression. Instead, it focuses on the specific historical and cultural conditions shaping women's lives in the Global South. Through fiction, these writers foreground how patriarchal constructs are naturalized within domestic and religious institutions, thereby normalizing female subservience. This study, therefore, situates literature as both a reflection of social hierarchies and a tool for feminist resistance.

Research Gap

Despite a growing body of feminist postcolonial scholarship, there remains a gap in comparative analyses that link the constructs of motherhood, duty, and obedience across South Asian and Middle Eastern narratives. Most studies treat *The God of Small Things*, *Home Fire*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* individually focusing on nationalism, identity, or trauma but seldom as interconnected feminist interventions against patriarchal conditioning. Additionally, few works employ feminist deconstruction to explore how these novels simultaneously critique and reconfigure the ideological functions of motherhood and obedience. This research fills that void by offering a cross-cultural and theoretically integrated approach.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

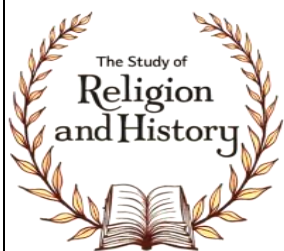
The research objectives of this study are fourfold:

1. To examine how the concepts of motherhood, duty, and obedience are constructed as tools of patriarchal control in postcolonial fiction.
2. To analyze how female characters in the selected novels negotiate, internalize, or resist these constructs.
3. To explore how feminist deconstruction exposes the ideological contradictions embedded in these representations.
4. To assess how these narratives contribute to redefining female agency within postcolonial contexts.

From these objectives, the central research questions guiding this study emerge:

1. How do patriarchal systems in postcolonial societies employ motherhood, duty, and obedience to regulate female identity and behavior?
2. In what ways do the selected novels expose and subvert these constructs?
3. How does feminist deconstruction illuminate the tensions between submission and agency in women's experiences?
4. What new perspectives on postcolonial gender politics emerge through a comparative feminist analysis of these texts?

Scope and Significance of the Study



THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

Vol.4 No.1 2026

ISSN P : [3006-3329](#)

ISSN E : [3006-3337](#)

The scope of this study extends beyond literary analysis into sociocultural critique, encompassing South Asian and Middle Eastern postcolonial societies. By engaging with diverse contexts, the research underscores how patriarchal ideologies transcend geographical boundaries yet manifest differently in specific traditions. The study's significance lies in its dual contribution: first, to feminist literary criticism by advancing the method of deconstructing patriarchal ideologies in fiction; and second, to postcolonial studies by revealing how women's bodies and moralities become battlegrounds for cultural and political control.

Furthermore, by examining literature as an instrument of resistance, the study reinforces the idea that storytelling functions as a transformative feminist act. It reveals how motherhood, duty, and obedience though outwardly repressive can also become vehicles for reimagining selfhood and autonomy. Thus, this research deepens our understanding of how postcolonial women writers and characters alike challenge the narrative grammar of patriarchy and inscribe alternative visions of empowerment and freedom.

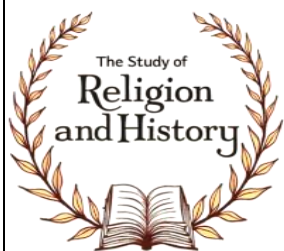
Literature Review

Feminist and postcolonial literary studies intersect on the grounds of resistance to hegemonic structures both, patriarchal and imperial. Scholars in these fields have persistently sought to deconstruct the ideological systems that justify women's subjugation under cultural, religious, and national imperatives. This section reviews the existing body of research on feminist interpretations of postcolonial literature, particularly focusing on the ways motherhood, duty, and obedience function as instruments of patriarchal hegemony. It also highlights critical debates surrounding female agency, resistance, and subjectivity in the works of Arundhati Roy, Kamila Shamsie, and Khaled Hosseini, identifying the theoretical and analytical gaps that the present study aims to address.

Feminism and Postcolonialism: Theoretical Intersections

The convergence of feminist and postcolonial discourses emerged prominently in the late twentieth century, with critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), and Sara Suleri (1992) articulating the "double colonization" of women oppressed both; by Western imperialism and indigenous patriarchy. Spivak's seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) foregrounded the silencing of women in colonial and postcolonial histories, emphasizing that the subaltern woman's voice is mediated through layers of power. Mohanty (2003), in *Feminism Without Borders*, critiques Western feminist generalizations that construct Third World women as homogenous victims, calling instead for attention to contextual, intersectional experiences. This critical framework underpins the present study's focus on culturally specific constructions of womanhood within postcolonial narratives.

Feminist theorists have also deconstructed the ideological functions of motherhood and obedience in sustaining patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) posited that womanhood is not an innate essence but a socially constructed identity shaped by cultural expectations. Judith Butler (1990) further advanced this notion through her theory of gender performativity, arguing that repetition of gendered acts reinforces the illusion of natural femininity. These theoretical insights



THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

Vol.4 No.1 2026

ISSN P : [3006-3329](#)

ISSN E : [3006-3337](#)

allow scholars to interrogate how motherhood idealized as women's "natural" role; serves to normalize gender hierarchies. Scholars such as Adrienne Rich (1976) in *Of Woman Born* distinguished between the "experience" and the "institution" of motherhood, highlighting how patriarchal systems exploit maternal love to enforce obedience and self-sacrifice. Within postcolonial literature, this institutionalized motherhood becomes a potent symbol of cultural continuity, moral purity, and national identity yet it simultaneously conceals mechanisms of control and repression.

Arundhati Roy and the Subversion of Domestic Patriarchy

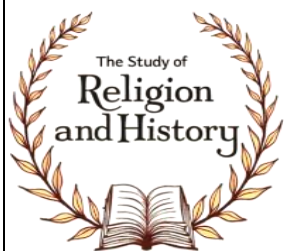
Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) has been extensively studied for its portrayal of caste, class, and gender oppression in postcolonial India. Scholars such as Nayar (2008) and Tickell (2007) interpret Roy's narrative as a critique of how social and cultural hierarchies intertwine to discipline the female body. Ammu, the novel's central female figure, becomes emblematic of resistance against both patriarchal and caste-based systems. Through her forbidden love affair with Velutha, a Dalit man, she violates social codes that equate female chastity with family honor. Critics such as Ray (2013) argue that Roy's portrayal of Ammu exposes the violence embedded in cultural notions of purity and motherhood. Ammu's ostracization after her transgression illustrates the punitive mechanisms by which patriarchy regulates women's desires.

Furthermore, scholars like Sunder Rajan (2001) have examined Roy's representation of the maternal figure as both nurturing and subversive. The mother-child relationship in the novel transcends biological roles, suggesting a redefinition of motherhood based on emotional authenticity rather than social duty. Ammu's defiance disrupts the patriarchal family structure, aligning with Beauvoir's (1949) argument that true freedom for women lies in transcending prescribed gender roles. Yet, as several critics point out, Roy's narrative refuses simplistic resolutions; Ammu's tragic fate underscores the immense cost of female autonomy in conservative societies. Thus, the novel functions as both a lament for and a critique of the constraints imposed on women through familial and cultural expectations.

Kamila Shamsie and Feminist Ethics of Resistance

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) reimagines Sophocles' *Antigone* within a contemporary Muslim and diasporic context, interrogating the intersections of gender, religion, and state power. Critics such as Ahmad (2020) and Hasan (2021) observe that Shamsie's adaptation situates the female protagonist's moral defiance within a patriarchal and political framework that conflates obedience to the state with obedience to the father. Aneeka's insistence on burying her brother, despite state prohibition, symbolizes a profound act of ethical resistance—a refusal to internalize patriarchal notions of loyalty and duty.

Shamsie's women characters, as noted by Akbar (2019), challenge both Western stereotypes of Muslim women and internal patriarchal ideologies that demand submission. Aneeka's relationship with her sister Isma further reveals generational and ideological tensions within postcolonial diasporas: while Isma's obedience reflects assimilationist tendencies, Aneeka's



THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

Vol.4 No.1 2026

ISSN P : [3006-3329](#)

ISSN E : [3006-3337](#)

rebellion asserts an alternative vision of agency rooted in love and moral conviction. Scholars have interpreted *Home Fire* as an exploration of how patriarchal systems manipulate familial bonds to sustain authority, echoing Spivak's (1988) critique of the familial as an ideological apparatus that naturalizes subordination. The novel thus participates in feminist deconstruction by revealing how "duty" and "obedience" serve as moral disguises for patriarchal control.

However, the critical discourse on Shamsie's work remains relatively limited compared to Roy or Hosseini. While some studies (e.g., Yaqoob, 2021) examine nationalism and religion in *Home Fire*, fewer have engaged with the novel through a specifically feminist-deconstructive lens that interrogates motherhood, duty, and obedience as interconnected constructs. This study addresses this gap by situating Shamsie's narrative within a broader feminist-postcolonial continuum, analyzing how her female protagonists reclaim agency through moral and emotional resistance rather than through overt political rebellion.

Khaled Hosseini and the Politics of Maternal Resistance

Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) has garnered substantial critical attention for its portrayal of Afghan women's lives under patriarchal and religious oppression. Scholars such as Hashimi (2018) and Jamil (2019) have emphasized Hosseini's use of motherhood as a site of both suffering and empowerment. Mariam's evolution from a submissive, illegitimate daughter to a self-sacrificing mother reflects the complex interplay between obedience and resistance in patriarchal societies. Laila's journey, similarly, demonstrates the transformative potential of female solidarity, echoing Mohanty's (2003) argument that collective resistance among women is central to dismantling patriarchal structures.

Critics such as Mortimer (2011) view Hosseini's narrative as a humanist critique of gendered violence, while others, including Rahimi (2020), caution that the novel risks reinforcing Western stereotypes of Muslim women as passive victims. Nonetheless, the text's nuanced portrayal of female resilience complicates such readings. Mariam's final act of violence killing her abusive husband to protect Laila reverses the paradigm of obedience, transforming motherhood into an act of agency and justice. As Nouraie-Simone (2006) notes, in many Islamic contexts, the maternal figure embodies moral authority; Hosseini reclaims this symbolism to reframe motherhood as resistance rather than submission.

While Hosseini's work is often celebrated for its empathetic representation of Afghan women, a closer feminist-deconstructive reading reveals deeper tensions: motherhood is simultaneously a tool of oppression and liberation. The ideal of the obedient mother is weaponized to confine women within domestic servitude, yet it becomes the very ground upon which women assert moral superiority and defy patriarchal violence. This ambivalence, largely overlooked in prior studies, forms a key analytical focus of the present research.

Identified Research Gaps

Despite the richness of scholarship on these individual authors, three critical gaps persist. First, existing analyses rarely compare how South Asian and Middle Eastern postcolonial narratives conceptualize motherhood and obedience as overlapping mechanisms of control. Most studies

remain regionally or author-specifically bound. Second, while feminist readings abound, relatively few employ deconstruction as a methodological lens to expose the ideological contradictions within patriarchal constructs.

Much of the current literature tends to interpret resistance in overt or political terms, neglecting the subtler, discursive forms of resistance that occur within familial or emotional domains. Third, scholarship often overlooks how postcolonial female characters reinterpret duty and obedience; not by rejecting these roles outright, but by imbuing them with subversive moral and emotional meanings. This dialectical approach to agency requires closer attention, which this study provides.

Conclusion of Literature Review

The existing literature demonstrates that postcolonial fiction provides fertile ground for exploring feminist resistance within patriarchal systems. Roy, Shamsie, and Hosseini each use the female experience as a lens through which broader questions of identity, morality, and power are negotiated. Their representations of motherhood, duty, and obedience reveal the subtle mechanisms through which patriarchy perpetuates itself under cultural and religious legitimations. Yet these same constructs also offer possibilities for resistance, as women transform submission into moral strength and suffering into agency. Building upon and extending previous scholarship, this study employs feminist deconstruction to uncover how these authors expose and dismantle the ideological foundations of patriarchal power in postcolonial societies.

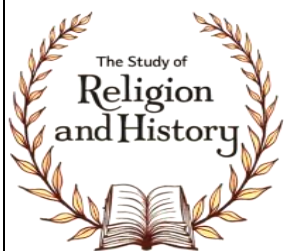
Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in feminist deconstruction, a critical framework that interrogates the ideological systems sustaining patriarchy and coloniality in postcolonial societies. Drawing upon the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, this framework examines how motherhood, duty, and obedience traditionally perceived as feminine virtues; operate as tools of patriarchal hegemony in literature and society. Through deconstructive feminist reading, the analysis reveals how postcolonial texts simultaneously reproduce and resist these gendered norms, thereby destabilizing the moral binaries that sustain patriarchal authority.

Feminist Deconstruction

Deconstruction, as developed by Jacques Derrida (1978), challenges the stability of binary oppositions such as male/female, rational/emotional, subject/object upon which Western thought and patriarchal ideology depend. Feminist scholars adapted this methodology to expose how gender identities are constructed through language, ideology, and discourse. Feminist deconstruction, therefore, does not merely reverse hierarchies but interrogates the very logic that sustains them. By applying this approach to postcolonial fiction, the study unravels how constructs like motherhood and obedience, seemingly natural and moral, conceal patriarchal control mechanisms that dictate women's roles and value.

Simone de Beauvoir: The Social Construction of Womanhood



THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

Vol.4 No.1 2026

ISSN P : [3006-3329](#)

ISSN E : [3006-3337](#)

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) provides the foundation for understanding gender as a social construct. Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 267) underlines that femininity is imposed through cultural conditioning rather than biology. Patriarchal societies, she argues, reduce women to the role of the "Other" defined only in relation to men. This concept is central to the current study's interpretation of motherhood and obedience in postcolonial fiction. Female characters in Roy, Shamsie, and Hosseini's novels are shaped by social expectations that equate womanhood with service, purity, and sacrifice. Yet, by transgressing these roles, they expose their constructed nature. Beauvoir's framework enables an examination of how patriarchal systems perpetuate inequality by disguising social subjugation as moral virtue.

Judith Butler: Gender Performativity and Subversion

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990) further extends Beauvoir's insight by proposing that gender is performed through repetitive acts that create the illusion of stable identity. For Butler, these performances are not merely expressions of gender but its very production. In patriarchal societies, women perform roles of duty and obedience as moral and cultural expectations. However, Butler also highlights the subversive potential of performance—when acts deviate from the norm, they expose gender's instability.

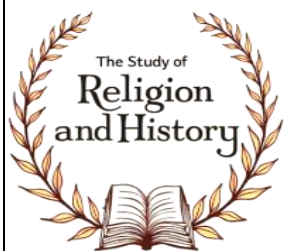
In the selected novels, this concept illuminates how women like Ammu (*The God of Small Things*), Aneeka (*Home Fire*), and Mariam (*A Thousand Splendid Suns*) both perform and disrupt gender norms. Their defiance whether through forbidden love, moral resistance, or acts of protection constitutes performative subversion, challenging patriarchal scripts from within. Butler's framework thus guides the study's analysis of how postcolonial women reclaim agency through embodied acts that re-signify motherhood and obedience as forms of strength rather than servility.

Gayatri Spivak: The Subaltern and Silenced Voices

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern from "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1988) is crucial for understanding women's marginalization within both; colonial and indigenous patriarchal structures. Spivak argues that the subaltern woman's voice is often erased or mediated through dominant power discourses, rendering her socially inaudible. This theoretical insight is particularly relevant to postcolonial fiction, where female characters are often silenced by social, religious, and familial hierarchies.

By reading Roy, Shamsie, and Hosseini through Spivak's lens, this study explores how these authors restore agency to subaltern women by narrating their inner lives, moral conflicts, and acts of defiance. Ammu's transgression, Aneeka's rebellion, and Mariam's sacrifice all signify moments where the subaltern woman "speaks" through action, defying patriarchal silence. Spivak's theory also enables a critique of how postcolonial societies, in seeking to assert cultural authenticity, often reinscribe the very patriarchal norms they claim to resist.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Decolonizing Feminism



THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

Vol.4 No.1 2026

ISSN P : [3006-3329](#)

ISSN E : [3006-3337](#)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders* (2003) critiques Western feminism's universalizing tendencies and calls for a contextual, intersectional understanding of women's oppression. Mohanty emphasizes that Third World women's experiences must be analyzed within specific cultural, historical, and political contexts. This perspective informs the study's comparative approach, which examines how South Asian and Middle Eastern postcolonial narratives construct and challenge patriarchal ideals differently.

Mohanty's notion of decolonizing feminism is particularly relevant for understanding motherhood as a culturally specific yet politically charged construct. In the novels studied, motherhood operates simultaneously as a site of cultural preservation and female exploitation. By reclaiming motherhood as a space of moral and emotional resistance, the authors decolonize the feminine ideal, turning a patriarchal burden into a tool of self-assertion.

Synthesis: Feminist Deconstruction in Postcolonial Contexts

Integrating these theoretical perspectives, feminist deconstruction in this study functions as both critique and reconstruction. It critiques the patriarchal ideologies embedded in postcolonial narratives while reconstructing alternative forms of female subjectivity and resistance. The selected theorists collectively enable a multi-layered analysis: Beauvoir exposes gender's social fabrication; Butler reveals its performative instability; Spivak uncovers the silencing of subaltern women; and Mohanty situates this struggle within postcolonial cultural politics.

Applied to the works of Roy, Shamsie, and Hosseini, this framework reveals how motherhood, duty, and obedience operate as discursive sites of conflict where women simultaneously conform to and subvert patriarchal norms. Deconstruction becomes a feminist strategy to expose how moral virtues serve as ideological disguises for control, while the same virtues when reinterpreted by women become vehicles of empowerment. Thus, the conceptual framework positions feminist deconstruction not merely as an interpretive lens but as an act of epistemic resistance against the patriarchal logic that defines and confines postcolonial womanhood.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design anchored in feminist literary criticism and deconstructive textual analysis. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth exploration of how postcolonial fiction represents women's experiences under patriarchal domination, focusing on the ideological construction of motherhood, duty, and obedience. The methodology aligns with interpretive traditions in literary studies, emphasizing meaning-making through textual interpretation rather than quantifiable measurement. The analysis engages with three major postcolonial novels—*The God of Small Things* (Arundhati Roy, 1997), *Home Fire* (Kamila Shamsie, 2017), and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Khaled Hosseini, 2007)—to investigate how patriarchal norms shape and are challenged within these narratives.

Research Design

The study follows a qualitative-descriptive design, aiming to interpret how selected literary texts construct, reproduce, and contest patriarchal ideologies through female characterization and thematic representation. The qualitative design allows for flexible and contextual analysis,

privileging depth over breadth. Literary texts are treated as cultural artifacts that reflect and critique social realities, particularly the intersections of gender, power, and postcolonial identity. The feminist-deconstructive approach does not seek to impose universal truths but rather to uncover the contradictions and instabilities within patriarchal discourse. This design aligns with Derrida's (1978) concept of deconstruction, which exposes how meaning is produced through difference and opposition. In this context, motherhood, duty, and obedience are analyzed not as fixed categories but as contested ideological sites where patriarchal values are simultaneously reinforced and undermined.

Data Sources

The primary data for this study consist of the three selected novels:

1. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), set in postcolonial Kerala, India, explores caste, family, and forbidden love. It provides insight into how cultural purity and motherhood are weaponized against women who transgress social boundaries.
2. Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) reimagines Sophocles' *Antigone* in a contemporary diasporic and Muslim setting, examining how women negotiate obedience to both familial and political authority.
3. Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) portrays women's suffering and resilience in patriarchal Afghanistan, revealing how duty and sacrifice shape gendered oppression.

These texts were selected purposively for their representative diversity spanning South Asian and Middle Eastern contexts and their shared engagement with patriarchal constructs in postcolonial societies.

The secondary data include scholarly books, journal articles, and theoretical works in feminist and postcolonial studies. Key theorists, Beauvoir (1949), Butler (1990), Spivak (1988), and Mohanty (2003) inform the conceptual foundation. Critical analyses of the selected novels from peer-reviewed journals provide supplementary perspectives to situate this study within existing scholarship.

Sampling and Selection Rationale

This study employs purposive sampling, selecting texts that exemplify the intersection of gender, patriarchy, and postcolonial identity. The novels were chosen based on three main criteria:

1. Each centers on female protagonists navigating patriarchal oppression.
2. Each represents a distinct postcolonial or Islamic sociocultural context.
3. Each has received significant critical attention, offering both academic engagement and interpretive gaps to explore.

By juxtaposing these narratives, the study seeks to identify shared thematic patterns, especially concerning motherhood and obedience as well as culturally specific manifestations of patriarchal control.

Analytical Approach

The analysis applies feminist deconstruction as its primary interpretive lens. Textual and thematic analysis are used to examine how narrative language, character arcs, and symbolic representations construct and contest patriarchal meanings. The analytical process involves the following stages:

1. Close Reading: Each text is read multiple times to identify recurring motifs and linguistic patterns associated with motherhood, duty, and obedience.
2. Coding and Categorization: Instances of female subjugation, silence, resistance, and moral conflict are categorized under thematic nodes such as “sacrifice,” “moral obedience,” “maternal resistance,” and “agency.”
3. Interpretation through Theory: Each thematic node is analyzed through feminist theoretical frameworks: Beauvoir’s concept of woman as the “Other,” Butler’s performativity, Spivak’s subalternity, and Mohanty’s contextual feminism.
4. Comparative Synthesis: The findings from each novel are compared to identify both convergences and divergences in how patriarchal constructs are represented and deconstructed.

The analysis privileges textual evidence narrative descriptions, dialogue, symbolism, and metaphors that reveal the ideological mechanisms at work. Quotations and close textual commentary are used to substantiate interpretations, ensuring analytical rigor and theoretical coherence.

Research Paradigm and Reflexivity

The study operates within an interpretivist paradigm, recognizing that meaning in literature is contextually constructed and mediated through both authorial and reader perspectives. As a feminist inquiry, the research acknowledges its positionality that interpretation is shaped by awareness of gender and power relations. Reflexivity is integral: the researcher maintains sensitivity to how their cultural and academic standpoint influences the reading of texts. This aligns with feminist methodology’s emphasis on ethical engagement, empathy, and the pursuit of social justice through knowledge production (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

Although literary analysis does not involve human participants, ethical responsibility lies in representation and interpretation. The study ensures that cultural and religious contexts of the novels are treated with respect and that interpretations avoid imposing Western-centric or homogenizing feminist frameworks. Following Mohanty’s (2003) caution, the analysis avoids essentializing “Third World women” and instead foregrounds their agency and complexity. All scholarly sources are properly cited according to APA 7th edition standards to uphold academic integrity.

Limitations of Methodology

The qualitative nature of the study prioritizes interpretive depth over generalizability. As literary meaning is inherently subjective, conclusions drawn here reflect critical interpretation rather than

empirical validation. However, this subjectivity is strength within feminist research, which values multiple perspectives and contextual understanding over positivist objectivity.

Analysis and Discussion

This section interprets how patriarchal constructs of motherhood, duty, and obedience operate within and against postcolonial systems of power in *The God of Small Things* (Arundhati Roy), *Home Fire* (Kamila Shamsie), and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Khaled Hosseini). Through a feminist-deconstructive reading, each novel reveals how women's identities are shaped by sociocultural expectations that equate female virtue with self-sacrifice and submission. Yet, each text simultaneously unsettles this logic by dramatizing moments of female resistance and self-assertion. Drawing upon theorists such as Beauvoir (1949), Butler (1990), Spivak (1988), and Mohanty (2003), the analysis reveals that postcolonial literature becomes a site where patriarchal narratives are exposed, interrogated, and transformed.

1. Motherhood as a Site of Power and Pain

Motherhood, often idealized as the pinnacle of feminine virtue, becomes in these novels both a mechanism of control and a means of resistance. In patriarchal cultures, women's worth is frequently measured through their capacity to nurture and obey, but these novels depict how motherhood is politicized, constrained, and redefined by women themselves.

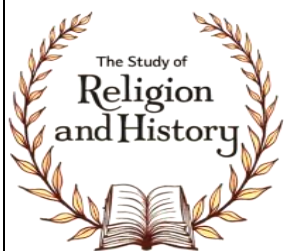
The God of Small Things

In Roy's novel, Ammu embodies the double bind of motherhood under patriarchy. As a divorced woman in conservative Kerala, she is stigmatized not only for her marital failure but also for her sexuality. Her love for Velutha, a man from a lower caste, transgresses both class and gender boundaries, resulting in her social annihilation. Ammu's maternal identity becomes a site of punishment and resistance. She is simultaneously condemned for desiring autonomy and for failing to the ideal of the "sacrificial mother". Beauvoir's (1949) argument that "motherhood has been used to imprison woman in her femininity" resonates here: Ammu's love for her children is genuine but circumscribed by the moral codes of caste and purity. Roy deconstructs this ideal by portraying motherhood not as sanctified duty but as a painful assertion of individuality in a world where women's bodies are treated as vessels of family honor.

A Thousand Splendid Suns

In contrast, Hosseini's Mariam and Laila experience motherhood within the brutal framework of Taliban patriarchy. Mariam's barrenness initially positions her as a failed woman, reflecting how motherhood becomes a test of moral worth. Yet, when she kills Rasheed to save Laila, Mariam's act redefines maternal love as a radical act of defiance. She becomes a symbolic mother not by giving birth, but by sacrificing herself to protect another woman and child. Butler's (1990) theory of performativity applies here, Mariam performs the role of the "obedient wife" until that performance collapses under the weight of violence. Her final act exposes how patriarchal scripts of obedience can be subverted through moral agency. Thus, motherhood in Hosseini's novel transcends biology, emerging as a political act of empathy and resistance.

Home Fire



THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY

Vol.4 No.1 2026

ISSN P : [3006-3329](#)

ISSN E : [3006-3337](#)

In Shamsie's *Home Fire*, the maternal figure Isma represents both emotional resilience and moral dilemma. Her duty to protect her siblings after their parents' death is complicated by cultural expectations of obedience within a Muslim immigrant family. When her brother Pervaiz joins a terrorist group, Isma is torn between familial love and civic duty, an echo of Antigone's tragic conflict. Here, motherhood and sisterhood overlap as Isma assumes a maternal role that challenges traditional boundaries of gender and authority. Mohanty's (2003) framework of contextual feminism helps interpret Isma's moral struggle: she resists both Western narratives that demonize Muslim women and patriarchal ones that demand silent loyalty. Shamsie reimagines motherhood not as submission to family honor, but as a moral negotiation within intersecting systems of patriarchy, religion, and nationalism.

Across these novels, motherhood is thus deconstructed from an ideal into an experience; one shaped by oppression but capable of agency. The maternal body becomes a site where the personal and political collide.

2. Duty and the Burden of Obedience

Patriarchal societies often construct women's duty as synonymous with obedience to father, husband, family, or nation. The novels interrogate this moral code by depicting women who initially internalize obedience as virtue but later reclaim it as self-determination.

The God of Small Things

Ammu's daughter, Rahel, inherits her mother's fragmented identity. Her silence and emotional dislocation reveal the long shadow of patriarchal "duty." She observes the destruction of her family through the moral policing of her mother's desires. Roy's narrative structure itself resists patriarchal order, nonlinear, cyclical, and fragmented; mirroring Rahel's attempt to reconstruct meaning from trauma. Through Rahel's quiet defiance, Roy dismantles the idea that duty must equal conformity. Instead, Rahel's reunion with Estha becomes an act of reclaiming forbidden emotion; a deeply unsettling yet symbolically liberating gesture against the constraints of social duty.

Home Fire

Shamsie's characters are caught between national and familial loyalties. Aneeka's defiance of the state's authority to reclaim her brother's body echoes Antigone's rebellion. Her "duty" to kinship clashes with the demands of citizenship, reflecting how patriarchal and political structures intersect to control women's morality. In Shamsie's reworking, Aneeka's defiance becomes a gendered critique of political obedience. While male figures like Parvaiz and Eamonn are destroyed by ideological absolutism, Aneeka's loyalty exposes the emotional costs of a system that demands women's compliance in the name of order. As Spivak (1988) would suggest, Aneeka becomes the "subaltern" whose voice challenges both imperial and patriarchal power, yet whose agency remains precariously unheard.

A Thousand Splendid Suns

For Mariam and Laila, duty initially manifests as forced marriage and domestic servitude. Patriarchy is codified into everyday obedience; a woman's silence becomes her survival strategy.

However, as their sisterly bond grows, duty is redefined as solidarity. Mariam's final sacrifice subverts the moral code of obedience: she accepts execution not out of submission, but as an assertion of moral choice. This transformation aligns with Beauvoir's (1949) view that liberation requires transcending the immanence imposed on women; the state of "being-for-others." Mariam's death, though tragic, becomes reclamation of selfhood through action.

3. Female Voice and Silence: Deconstructing Patriarchal Language

All three novels foreground the silencing of women as a tool of patriarchal control; yet they also reveal how silence can be repurposed as a form of resistance. In *The God of Small Things*, silence is inherited. The narrative oscillates between unsaid memories and fragmented voices, mirroring how women's pain is erased from collective consciousness. Ammu's and Rahel's silences echo Spivak's (1988) famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" Roy answers indirectly yes, but only through fractured storytelling that disrupts colonial and patriarchal linearity. In *Home Fire*, Shamsie reclaims silence as strategy. Isma's measured restraint in dialogues with authorities contrasts with Aneeka's public outcry, revealing two modes of female articulation: controlled negotiation and emotional rebellion. Both are legitimate voices against masculine authority.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, silence is initially enforced through violence. Mariam's muteness before Rasheed represents the suppression of speech under domestic tyranny. Yet, as the narrative unfolds, silence gives way to solidarity; women's voices merge into collective defiance. When Mariam tells Laila, "It's time to end this," her voice reclaims the moral agency denied to her. Deconstructively, language in these novels exposes its own complicity. The same words "honor," "duty," "obedience" that sustain patriarchy also become tools for rebellion once redefined through female subjectivity.

4. Intersection of Patriarchy and Postcolonial Identity

Patriarchy in these texts is not isolated but interwoven with colonial residues and national politics. Postcolonial feminism emphasizes that gender oppression intersects with race, class, religion, and nationhood (Mohanty, 2003). In *The God of Small Things*, caste hierarchy functions as a colonial inheritance. Ammu's punishment for crossing caste boundaries mirrors the legacy of imperial power, a reminder that colonialism and patriarchy operate through similar logics of purity and control.

In *Home Fire*, the surveillance of Muslim bodies in the West reconfigures patriarchal power into racialized nationalism. Women's obedience is not only familial but political; they are expected to represent both moral virtue and cultural loyalty. Shamsie critiques how patriarchal and colonial gazes overlap to regulate female identity.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini depicts patriarchy as state apparatus codified into Taliban law. Yet, within this oppression, women build emotional communities that subvert control. The private space of female solidarity becomes a counter-discourse to state-sanctioned silence, aligning with Spivak's (1988) notion of subaltern agency through collective resistance.

5. Reconstruction: From Obedience to Agency

The feminist deconstruction of these texts does not merely dismantle patriarchy but also reconstructs alternative possibilities of identity. Each protagonist transitions from imposed obedience to self-fashioned moral agency.

- Ammu and Rahel reclaim forbidden love as a moral truth that exceeds social codes.
- Mariam and Laila turn motherhood into solidarity, a politics of care.
- Isma and Aneeka transform familial duty into a critique of national hypocrisy.

Through these arcs, the novels embody Butler's (1990) theory that gender and identity are performative, continually reconstituted through acts of resistance. Obedience, once a tool of subjugation, becomes a performative choice redefined by intention and context.

The deconstructive reading thus reveals not just the fractures within patriarchal ideology but also the potential for regeneration. The act of rewriting patriarchal narratives becomes itself a feminist act of creation.

Conclusion of Analysis

Across Roy, Shamsie, and Hosseini, motherhood, duty, and obedience emerge as contested terrains where women navigate identity, morality, and power. These novels dismantle the patriarchal binaries of virtue and transgression, silence and speech, submission and rebellion. Through feminist deconstruction, each text exposes the moral contradictions that sustain patriarchal authority while celebrating women's capacity to reimagine these roles on their own terms.

As postcolonial feminist narratives, these works affirm that obedience can be ethical without being submissive, and motherhood can be empowering without being sacrificial. Their female protagonists fragmented, complex, and resilient, symbolize the ongoing struggle to speak, act, and exist beyond the boundaries of patriarchal expectation.

Conclusion

This study has examined how postcolonial fiction reimagines the concepts of motherhood, duty, and obedience through feminist deconstruction, particularly in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. Each of these novels reveals the multifaceted nature of women's experiences in patriarchal societies where motherhood is idealized yet exploited, duty is revered yet oppressive, and obedience is moralized yet silencing. Through close textual analysis and feminist theoretical perspectives, this paper has demonstrated how these constructs are historically and culturally manufactured to sustain gendered hierarchies, while simultaneously providing sites for subtle resistance and moral agency.

A central argument emerging from this research is that postcolonial women's writing destabilizes patriarchal moralities by reclaiming the symbolic language of virtue. The protagonists in these texts resist being passive subjects of patriarchal norms. Ammu's defiance of caste and gender boundaries, Isma's moral courage amid social surveillance, and Mariam's sacrificial act of rebellion all challenge the systemic conflation of femininity with submission. By portraying women who redefine motherhood as selfhood, duty as solidarity, and obedience as moral choice,

these authors disrupt the colonial-patriarchal logic that equates virtue with silence and virtue with servitude.

The feminist deconstructive approach reveals that these novels do not simply reverse patriarchal hierarchies; they expose the instability of gendered binaries. Following Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, each protagonist performs and redefines her role within the symbolic order, transforming culturally imposed obedience into ethical autonomy. The act of deconstruction becomes an act of re-creation turning the structures of domination into frameworks of expression. Roy's fragmented narrative style mirrors the broken yet enduring female consciousness; Shamsie's dialogic structure emphasizes negotiation between personal and political identity, and Hosseini's intimate portrayal of suffering converts silence into testimony. Furthermore, these novels collectively illuminate the intersection of patriarchy and postcolonial power. In societies scarred by colonial histories, women's bodies and moralities become battlegrounds for cultural identity. The female body is politicized—as bearer of national honor, as target of social control, and as symbol of moral continuity. Feminist postcolonial theory, as articulated by Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (2003), underscores this intersectionality: women's oppression cannot be understood outside the contexts of race, class, and colonial legacies. The novels' protagonists embody this complexity, living at the crossroads of familial expectation, religious ideology, and state politics. Their stories thus resist both patriarchal confinement and Western universalism, asserting instead a plural, situated feminism.

The implications of this study extend beyond literary critique. The reimagining of motherhood, duty, and obedience speaks to ongoing global discourses on gender justice, cultural relativism, and moral autonomy. These texts remind us that feminist resistance is not only found in overt rebellion but also in endurance, empathy, and moral clarity. In postcolonial societies, where patriarchal norms are deeply embedded in cultural and religious narratives, such reinterpretations of womanhood open pathways to redefining ethical and emotional agency.

Future research can expand this inquiry by including comparative analyses across other cultural contexts such as African, Caribbean, or Middle Eastern postcolonial fiction to explore how motherhood and duty evolve under different religious and political frameworks. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches involving gender studies, trauma theory, and cultural anthropology may deepen understanding of how women's narratives contribute to collective healing and resistance.

In conclusion, the feminist deconstruction of patriarchal constructs in postcolonial fiction reveals a dynamic process of cultural and ideological transformation. Through their redefinition of motherhood, duty, and obedience, authors like Roy, Shamsie, and Hosseini give voice to women's struggles not merely as victims of patriarchy but as creators of meaning, bearers of moral strength, and agents of historical change. Their works remind us that the path from obedience to autonomy is neither linear nor complete; it is a continuous negotiation of identity within structures of power. Yet, in every act of speech, silence, care, or defiance, these women rewrite the language of subjugation into one of resilience and renewal.

References

- Beauvoir, S. de. (1949). *The second sex*. Vintage Books.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Hosseini, K. (2007). *A thousand splendid suns*. Riverhead Books.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.
- Roy, A. (1997). *The God of small things*. HarperCollins.
- Shamsie, K. (2017). *Home fire*. Riverhead Books.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak?* In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.