

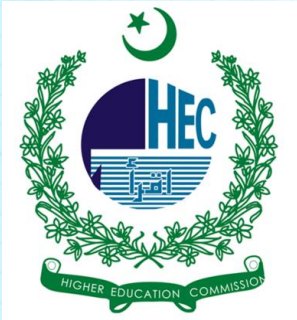
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**Female Subaltern and Oppression in Shakib's Afghanistan,
where GOD Only Comes to Weep**



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Abstract

Afghan women continue to face systemic oppression and marginalization in a patriarchal society, which limits their social, legal, and political agency. Despite international attention, their voices remain largely silenced, and scholarly understanding of their lived experiences in literary representation is limited. This study examines the portrayal of Afghan women as subaltern subjects in literature, highlighting their struggles, social constraints, and resistance strategies. The research aims to reveal how cultural norms and patriarchal structures perpetuate gender inequality and to contribute to feminist literary criticism and postcolonial studies. The study applies subaltern theory (Spivak, 1988) and feminist theory (hooks, 2000; Millet, 1971) to analyze female characters. It also draws on intersectional perspectives to understand the multiplicity of oppression experienced by Afghan women in both domestic and public spheres. A qualitative, interpretive approach was employed. Textual analysis was conducted on key novels and literary works portraying Afghan women, including comparative evaluation of social, political, and cultural narratives. Data were collected through close reading and thematic coding, focusing on oppression, marginalization, and agency. The findings revealed that female characters experience forced marriage, domestic violence, and social isolation. Patriarchal traditions significantly restrict their autonomy and reinforce societal marginalization. The study also identified subtle forms of resistance where women challenge gender norms through personal agency and strategic negotiation. Afghan women are depicted as subaltern voices, whose experiences are shaped by intersecting forms of oppression. Literature provides a critical lens to understand the social and political mechanisms that maintain gender inequality and the resilience of women in challenging contexts. Future research should explore the role of education, policy reforms, and literary activism in amplifying Afghan women's voices. Integrating subaltern perspectives into feminist and postcolonial studies can further enrich understanding and advocacy for marginalized groups.

Keywords: Afghan women, feminism, gender inequality, literary representation, subaltern, patriarchy

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Introduction

The subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak, 1988, p. 287). This powerful statement raises a troubling question: why do many women in conflict-ridden societies remain unheard despite global feminist movements advocating equality? In Afghanistan, the answer often lies in the intersection of patriarchy, war, and distorted religious interpretations that silence women's voices. Afghanistan has long been characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms where male authority dominates social, political, and familial spheres. Consequently, women are frequently confined to private spaces, deprived of autonomy, and excluded from public participation. Moreover, decades of political instability and armed conflict since the late twentieth century have intensified gender inequality and pushed Afghan women further into subaltern positions. Within this socio-historical context, literature becomes an important site through which the experiences of marginalized women can be explored and understood.

Historically, Afghan society has been shaped by traditional masculine norms that grant men control over social institutions while restricting women's freedom. Women are often discouraged from speaking publicly, making independent decisions, or participating in education and employment due to fears of social dishonor. Furthermore, cultural traditions such as Pashtunwali are often interpreted in ways that reinforce male dominance and female obedience. According to Telesetsky (1998), extremist regimes such as the Taliban manipulated religious teachings to legitimize patriarchal authority, thereby strengthening gender-based restrictions on Afghan women. As a result, religion—rather than serving as a liberating spiritual framework—has at times been used to reinforce systems of male power and female subordination.

In addition, continuous wars and political turmoil have worsened the condition of Afghan women. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked the beginning of decades of violent conflict that destabilized Afghan society (Moghadam, 1993). Subsequently, resistance movements and later Taliban rule imposed strict regulations that excluded women from public life, banned female education, and enforced compulsory veiling. During this period, women were frequently subjected to domestic violence, forced marriages, and social isolation. Similarly, later military interventions

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and political struggles further intensified insecurity, leaving women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Khattak, 2002). Therefore, Afghan women's oppression cannot be understood solely as a cultural issue; rather, it emerges from the complex interaction of patriarchy, war, and political instability.

More broadly, female oppression and subalternity are global phenomena that occur across different societies and cultures. Feminist scholars have long argued that patriarchal systems systematically marginalize women in both private and public domains. For instance, Mill (1869) strongly criticized gender inequality within marriage and advocated equal rights for women. Likewise, early feminist thinkers such as Wollstonecraft (1792) emphasized the need for women's education and independence as a means of challenging patriarchal oppression. Furthermore, hooks (2000) defines feminism as a movement aimed at ending sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. Thus, feminist discourse provides an important framework for analyzing the systematic marginalization of women across societies.

From a theoretical perspective, oppression operates at multiple levels within society. According to Barone (1998), oppression can occur at institutional, social, and individual levels where social structures restrict people's opportunities and agency. Similarly, Young (1992) conceptualizes oppression through her influential framework of the *Five Faces of Oppression*, which includes exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Importantly, these dimensions highlight how women experience layered forms of domination that limit their ability to express themselves and participate equally in society. In the same vein, Millet (1971) argues that the family itself functions as a patriarchal institution that socializes individuals into gender-based hierarchies, thereby perpetuating women's subordination. Consequently, female oppression is not merely an individual experience but a structural phenomenon embedded in social institutions.

Within literary studies, the concept of the subaltern provides a crucial analytical framework for understanding marginalized voices. The concept was widely developed by Spivak (1988), who questioned whether the oppressed can truly speak within systems that deny them representation. According to her argument, subaltern individuals may attempt to speak, yet their voices are often distorted or ignored due to power structures that prevent genuine communication. Particularly, the female

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subaltern faces a double marginalization: first through colonial or political domination and second through patriarchal gender hierarchies. Therefore, analyzing literary representations of women within oppressed societies becomes essential for revealing how their voices are silenced or mediated by dominant narratives.

Despite extensive scholarly discussions on gender inequality and feminist theory, there remains a significant research gap regarding the literary representation of Afghan women as subaltern subjects. Many studies focus on historical or political aspects of Afghan society; however, fewer analyses examine how literature depicts the psychological and social consequences of women's silencing. Moreover, the interaction between war, patriarchal culture, and distorted religious interpretation in shaping women's subaltern identities has not been sufficiently explored in literary criticism. Consequently, this study addresses this gap by examining the representation of female subalternity in Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*.

The novel portrays the life of Afghan women who struggle against patriarchal oppression, forced marriages, violence, and social exclusion. Through narrative representation, the text reveals how Afghan women are pushed into voiceless positions within both family and society. Furthermore, it demonstrates how cultural traditions, religious misinterpretations, and prolonged conflicts collectively silence female voices. Therefore, the novel provides a powerful literary lens through which the lived experiences of Afghan women can be critically examined.

In this context, the present study aims to investigate the loss of voice and the oppressive conditions experienced by female characters in Shakib's novel using the theoretical framework of subaltern studies. Drawing primarily on Spivak's (1988) concept of the subaltern, the study analyzes how women's voices are marginalized by social *noise* such as patriarchal traditions, war, and distorted religious narratives. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the factors that contribute to female subalternity and to explore how these factors operate within the narrative structure of the novel.

Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to contribute to feminist literary scholarship by highlighting the complex mechanisms that silence Afghan women in both society and literature. By doing so, the study not only deepens the understanding of female

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oppression in Afghan contexts but also underscores the broader relevance of subaltern theory in analyzing marginalized voices across global literature. Thus, the research emphasizes the importance of literature as a medium through which suppressed experiences can be recognized, interpreted, and critically discussed.

Research Objectives

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the representation of female subalternity and oppression in Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*.
2. To analyze the socio-cultural factors—such as patriarchy, war, and religious misinterpretation—that contribute to the silencing and marginalization of Afghan women in the novel.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are Afghan women represented as subaltern and oppressed subjects in Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*?
2. What socio-cultural forces contribute to the silencing and marginalization of female characters in the novel?

Research Problem

Although extensive feminist scholarship has addressed women's oppression in patriarchal societies, the specific condition of female subalternity in conflict-ridden societies such as Afghanistan remains insufficiently examined within literary studies. Afghan women have historically faced multiple layers of marginalization due to patriarchal traditions, continuous wars, and the misinterpretation of religion. Consequently, their voices are frequently suppressed within both social and cultural structures.

Moreover, literary texts that portray the experiences of Afghan women often reveal how oppression operates at psychological, cultural, and institutional levels. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to the representation of female subalternity in Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. In particular, the mechanisms through which women's voices are silenced and marginalized within the narrative have not been sufficiently analyzed using the theoretical framework of subaltern studies.

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Therefore, the central research problem of this study lies in examining how Afghan women are portrayed as subaltern subjects in the novel and how various socio-cultural forces contribute to their oppression and loss of voice. By addressing this problem, the study seeks to explore the intersection of patriarchy, war, and cultural traditions in shaping female subaltern identity within the literary text.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value both academically and socially. Firstly, it contributes to feminist literary criticism by examining the representation of female oppression in Afghan literature through the lens of subaltern theory. Secondly, the study expands scholarly understanding of how literary narratives portray marginalized voices in conflict-ridden societies.

Furthermore, the research highlights how cultural traditions, patriarchal systems, and prolonged wars collectively shape women's experiences of oppression. In addition, by focusing on Shakib's novel, the study brings attention to a literary work that vividly portrays the struggles of Afghan women and exposes the realities of their social marginalization.

Finally, the study contributes to broader discussions on gender justice and human rights by emphasizing the importance of recognizing and analyzing suppressed female voices in literature. Thus, it not only enriches literary scholarship but also promotes awareness of women's lived experiences in patriarchal societies.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. First, the research focuses only on one literary text—Shakib's *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. Consequently, the findings may not represent the experiences of all Afghan women or the broader scope of Afghan literature.

Second, the analysis is primarily based on a qualitative literary interpretation using subaltern theory. Therefore, the study does not include empirical or sociological data about Afghan women's real-life experiences.

Finally, the research is limited to examining themes of female oppression and subalternity within the narrative structure of the novel. Other important aspects, such as narrative technique, stylistic features, or comparative literary analysis, remain beyond the scope of this study.

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Originality and Novelty of the Study

The originality of this study lies in its application of subaltern theory to analyze the representation of Afghan women in Shakib's novel, which has received limited scholarly attention in literary criticism. Specifically, the study investigates how female characters are rendered voiceless within the narrative and how various socio-cultural structures contribute to their marginalization.

Moreover, the research introduces a combined analytical perspective that connects feminist theory, subaltern studies, and the socio-political context of Afghanistan. By doing so, the study offers a deeper understanding of how literature reflects and critiques systems of oppression affecting women in conflict-ridden societies.

Therefore, the novelty of this research lies not only in its focus on a relatively underexplored literary text but also in its attempt to reveal the complex relationship between gender, power, and subaltern identity within the narrative framework of the novel.

Literature Review

The question of female oppression and subalternity has been widely explored within feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and literary criticism. However, the specific representation of Afghan women's subaltern condition in literary narratives remains relatively underexplored. Therefore, this literature review examines scholarly discussions on three interconnected areas: feminist understandings of women's oppression, subaltern theory and the silencing of marginalized voices, and literary representations of Afghan women in contexts of war and patriarchy. By synthesizing these perspectives, the review establishes the theoretical and scholarly foundation for analyzing female subalternity in Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. Moreover, it identifies the gaps within existing scholarship that justify the present study.

Firstly, feminist scholarship has long examined the structural nature of women's oppression within patriarchal societies. Early feminist thinkers argued that women's inequality is deeply embedded in social institutions such as family, education, and religion. For example, Mill (1869) strongly criticized the legal and social inequalities faced by women and advocated equal rights in marriage and society.

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Similarly, Wollstonecraft (1792/1972) emphasized that women's subordination results largely from the denial of education and intellectual freedom. However, contemporary feminist scholars extend this argument by highlighting the intersection of gender with other forms of power such as race, class, and culture. hooks (2000) describes feminism as a movement aimed at ending sexism and systemic oppression, thereby emphasizing the political and structural dimensions of gender inequality. Furthermore, Young (1992) conceptualizes oppression through the framework of the *Five Faces of Oppression*, including exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that women's oppression is not merely an individual experience but a structural condition shaped by social institutions and cultural norms.

While feminist theory provides a foundation for understanding gender oppression, postcolonial scholars have further expanded this discussion through the concept of subalternity. Subaltern studies emerged as a critical approach to examining how marginalized groups are excluded from dominant historical and cultural narratives. Among the most influential contributions is Spivak's (1988) seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, which argues that subaltern subjects are often denied the ability to represent themselves within dominant discourses of power. Importantly, Spivak suggests that the female subaltern occupies an even more marginalized position because her voice is suppressed not only by colonial structures but also by patriarchal traditions. Consequently, even when subaltern women attempt to speak, their voices are frequently ignored or misinterpreted by dominant institutions. Later scholars have further elaborated this argument by emphasizing the role of communication barriers and socio-political structures that prevent marginalized groups from being heard (Maggio, 2007). Thus, subaltern theory provides an essential framework for analyzing how women's voices are silenced within both social and literary contexts.

In addition to theoretical discussions, scholars have increasingly examined the lived experiences of Afghan women within the socio-political context of war and cultural patriarchy. Afghanistan has endured decades of political conflict, including the Soviet invasion, civil wars, and Taliban rule, all of which have significantly affected women's social status. Moghadam (2002) argues that Afghan women have

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historically faced systemic restrictions on education, employment, and political participation due to deeply rooted patriarchal traditions. Similarly, Kandiyoti (2007) highlights how the intersection of nationalism, religion, and gender norms has contributed to the regulation of women's roles in Afghan society. Moreover, research on Taliban policies reveals how religious interpretations were often manipulated to justify severe limitations on women's mobility and public presence (Telesetsky, 1998). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that Afghan women's marginalization is shaped by a complex interaction of cultural traditions, political instability, and religious discourse.

Nevertheless, despite the growing body of research on Afghan women's rights and social conditions, literary representations of Afghan women's experiences have received comparatively less critical attention. Some scholars have explored the portrayal of women in Afghan and diasporic literature, emphasizing themes of resilience, trauma, and resistance. For instance, studies of Afghan narratives often highlight how literary texts depict women's struggles against forced marriages, domestic violence, and social exclusion (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). Furthermore, scholars analyzing war literature suggest that female characters often function as symbolic representations of national suffering and resilience (Hirschkind & Mahmood, 2002). However, these studies primarily focus on sociological or historical interpretations rather than examining the narrative mechanisms through which women are rendered subaltern or voiceless in literary texts.

More specifically, research focusing on Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* remains limited. Existing analyses often emphasize the novel's portrayal of Afghan women's suffering and resilience within a war-torn society. While such studies provide valuable contextual insights, they rarely employ subaltern theory as a systematic analytical framework for examining how the novel constructs female marginalization. Additionally, many previous studies rely on descriptive interpretations rather than critically analyzing the discursive and narrative processes that silence women's voices. Consequently, there is still a need for a more theoretically grounded and critically engaged analysis of the novel.

From a methodological perspective, earlier research on Afghan women frequently relies on sociological and historical methods, including ethnographic studies, policy

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analysis, and human rights reports. While these approaches provide valuable empirical insights into women's real-life experiences, they often overlook the interpretive possibilities offered by literary analysis. In contrast, literary studies allow researchers to examine how narratives construct meaning, represent oppression, and reveal hidden power structures. Therefore, applying a qualitative textual analysis informed by subaltern theory offers a valuable methodological contribution to the study of Afghan women's representation in literature.

In summary, the existing literature demonstrates that feminist theory and subaltern studies provide essential frameworks for understanding women's oppression and marginalization. However, significant gaps remain in the analysis of Afghan literary texts that depict female subalternity within the context of war, patriarchy, and religious discourse. Particularly, the representation of women's silenced voices in Shakib's *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* has not been sufficiently examined through the lens of subaltern theory. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by critically analyzing how the novel portrays Afghan women as subaltern subjects and how socio-cultural forces contribute to their oppression. By doing so, the research contributes to feminist literary criticism and expands scholarly understanding of marginalized voices in postcolonial literature.

Research Gap

Although many scholars have studied women's oppression and patriarchy, an important gap still exists. Scholars such as Mill (1869), hooks (2000), and Young (1992) explain how social institutions like family, culture, and religion maintain women's subordination. Similarly, Spivak (1988) introduces the idea of the subaltern, showing how marginalized people, especially women, are often silenced in society. However, very few studies apply this theory to the literary representation of Afghan women.

Moreover, most research on Afghan women focuses on social, political, and historical issues. For example, Moghadam (2002) and Kandiyoti (2007) discuss how war, patriarchy, and cultural traditions restrict women's roles in Afghan society. While these studies are important, they mainly examine real-life conditions rather than literary portrayals of women's oppression.

Furthermore, Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* has

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received limited scholarly attention. Although the novel clearly shows the suffering and marginalization of Afghan women, it has rarely been analyzed through the lens of subaltern theory.

Therefore, a clear research gap exists in examining how female subalternity and oppression are represented in this novel. Consequently, this study aims to fill this gap by applying Spivak's concept of the subaltern to analyze the silencing and marginalization of women in Shakib's narrative.

Research Methodology

Introduction

This study investigates the loss of voice and the oppression of Afghan women portrayed in Siba Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. The methodology used in this research is qualitative and interpretive because literary texts are examined to understand meanings, experiences, and social realities. In this study, the condition of female subalternity is analyzed in relation to Afghan social norms, continuous wars, and distorted interpretations of religion. These elements are considered forms of *noise* that silence women's voices in society and within the narrative. The theoretical foundation of the study is provided by Spivak's concept of subalternity, which explains how marginalized subjects are prevented from speaking within dominant structures of power (Spivak, 1988). Furthermore, feminist literary criticism is also used to understand how patriarchal systems shape the oppression of women.

Research Philosophy and Research Approach

The research is guided by an interpretivist research philosophy. Interpretivism assumes that social reality is constructed through meanings, language, and cultural practices. Therefore, literary texts are interpreted to understand how social structures and power relations influence the experiences of marginalized groups. Moreover, this philosophy allows the researcher to explore how gender oppression and subalternity are represented in narrative discourse.

A qualitative research approach is adopted because the study focuses on interpreting meanings rather than measuring numerical data. Qualitative research is commonly used in literary and cultural studies to examine themes, symbols, and social representations within texts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, this

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approach helps reveal how female characters in the novel are silenced through social and cultural forces.

Research Design

The research design of this study is qualitative textual analysis. Textual analysis is used to examine the narrative elements of the novel, including characters, dialogues, and events that reflect female oppression and marginalization. Through this design, the text is analyzed to identify how Afghan women are portrayed as subaltern subjects.

The study is also informed by postcolonial theory, particularly Spivak's theory of subalternity. According to Spivak (1988), the subaltern refers to oppressed individuals who are excluded from dominant social and political structures. She argues that the female subaltern is even more marginalized because her voice is suppressed both by colonial power and patriarchal systems. Moreover, feminist perspectives are applied to examine how patriarchal traditions and cultural norms contribute to women's oppression in the novel.

Population and Sampling

In literary research, the population usually consists of texts that address similar themes or issues. In this study, the population includes literary works that portray Afghan women's experiences of oppression and marginalization. However, the selected sample for detailed analysis is Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*.

A purposive sampling technique is used to select relevant textual data. Passages, dialogues, and narrative descriptions that illustrate women's oppression, marginalization, and silencing are identified and selected as units of analysis. Furthermore, these textual extracts are examined carefully to understand how the narrative represents female subalternity.

Data Collection Methods

The primary data for this research are collected from the novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. Relevant phrases, sentences, dialogues, and actions of characters are identified and recorded as textual evidence. These citations are used to support the analysis of female oppression and the loss of voice within the narrative.

In addition, secondary data are collected from scholarly books and journal articles related to feminist theory, subaltern studies, and Afghan women's socio-political

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conditions. These sources provide theoretical support and contextual understanding for interpreting the text. Moreover, they help connect the narrative representation of women with broader social and cultural issues.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data are analyzed using qualitative thematic textual analysis. In this method, themes related to oppression, marginalization, violence, and silencing are identified within the narrative. These themes are then interpreted using the theoretical framework of subaltern theory.

According to Spivak (1988), the subaltern often cannot speak because dominant social structures prevent their voices from being heard. In the context of this study, Afghan women in the novel are analyzed as subaltern subjects whose voices are suppressed by social norms, war, and distorted interpretations of religion. Furthermore, the analysis examines how these elements create *noise* that disrupts communication and prevents women from expressing their experiences. The discourse between the oppressor and the oppressed groups is also analyzed from a postcolonial perspective, where the powerful are often represented as dominant while the marginalized are placed in inferior positions.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative literary research, reliability and validity are discussed in terms of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is ensured by using consistent theoretical frameworks and systematic textual analysis. Relevant passages from the novel are carefully selected and interpreted to support the research findings.

Furthermore, credibility is maintained by supporting interpretations with textual evidence and scholarly references. The use of established theoretical frameworks such as subaltern theory strengthens the validity of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, interpretations are explained clearly so that readers can understand the reasoning behind the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles are maintained throughout the research process. Since the study is based on textual analysis of a published novel, no human participants are involved. Nevertheless, proper academic practices are followed by accurately citing all sources and acknowledging the ideas of other scholars.

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Furthermore, the cultural context of Afghan society is discussed respectfully and objectively. Interpretations of the novel are presented carefully in order to avoid misrepresentation of cultural or social realities.

Limitations of the Methodology

Despite its strengths, the methodology used in this study has certain limitations. Firstly, the research focuses only on one literary text, which limits the generalization of the findings to other works of literature. Secondly, the interpretation of literary texts can vary among researchers because qualitative analysis is influenced by the researcher's perspective.

Furthermore, the study relies mainly on textual evidence rather than empirical data about the real-life experiences of Afghan women. However, literary texts still provide valuable insights into social realities and cultural narratives.

In summary, this study employs a qualitative interpretive methodology to examine female subalternity and oppression in Shakib's *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. An interpretivist research philosophy guides the study, and textual analysis is used as the main research design. The novel is selected through purposive sampling, and relevant passages are collected as primary data. These data are analyzed thematically using subaltern theory and feminist perspectives as analytical frameworks. Reliability and trustworthiness are ensured through systematic interpretation and scholarly support. Moreover, ethical research practices are maintained throughout the study. This methodological approach provides a structured framework for understanding how the novel represents the silencing and marginalization of Afghan women.

Discussion/Analysis

This study examined the representation of female subalternity and oppression in Siba Shakib's novel *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. First, the analysis focused on how Afghan women were portrayed as marginalized subjects whose voices were suppressed by patriarchal traditions, continuous war, and distorted interpretations of religion. Moreover, the study applied Spivak's concept of the subaltern to understand how female characters experienced silencing within the narrative structure (Spivak, 1988). As a result, the findings revealed that Afghan women in the novel were portrayed as victims of multiple layers of oppression that

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restricted their freedom, identity, and voice.

To begin with, the representation of female subalternity in the novel demonstrates how women are consistently portrayed as powerless and voiceless within Afghan patriarchal society. The analysis showed that female characters were confined to domestic spaces and denied the freedom to make decisions about their own lives. In fact, this condition reflects Spivak's argument that the female subaltern often remains unheard within dominant structures of power (Spivak, 1988). For example, the protagonist experiences forced marriage and strict social control imposed by male authority. The narrative clearly describes her helplessness when she realizes that she has no control over her own future. As the text states, *Shirin knew that her life belonged to others; she had no right to decide anything for herself* (Shakib, 2001, p. XX). This example clearly illustrates how the female character is treated as an object rather than an individual with agency. Consequently, such narrative moments represent the loss of voice experienced by Afghan women. Therefore, the female characters function as subaltern subjects whose identities are controlled by patriarchal power.

Furthermore, the novel repeatedly presents women as victims of domestic oppression and violence. For instance, women in the story are often forced into marriages at a very young age and are expected to obey male authority without resistance. Indeed, the text illustrates this social expectation clearly: *A woman must obey her father, then her husband, and later her son* (Shakib, 2001, p. XX). In this case, the statement reflects the patriarchal hierarchy that governs women's lives in the novel. Moreover, it also supports feminist arguments that family institutions often reproduce gender inequality and social control (hooks, 2000). Therefore, the narrative demonstrates how women's identities are shaped by patriarchal structures that deny them independence and autonomy.

In addition, the analysis explored the socio-cultural forces that contribute to the silencing of Afghan women. Specifically, three major forces were identified: patriarchy, war, and the misinterpretation of religion. First, patriarchal traditions play a central role in maintaining women's oppression. Afghan society in the novel is depicted as male-dominated, where women are expected to remain obedient and silent. Furthermore, the narrative shows that male characters control women's mobility,

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education, and participation in social life. Besides, cultural traditions such as arranged marriages further reinforce women's subordination. Consequently, female characters are rarely allowed to challenge these traditions. This portrayal, therefore, reflects broader feminist discussions about how patriarchal systems maintain women's oppression through cultural practices (Young, 1992).

Second, the study also found that war and political conflict intensify the oppression of women in the novel. Afghanistan's prolonged conflict creates an environment where violence, fear, and insecurity become part of everyday life. As a result, women experience displacement, poverty, and emotional suffering. For example, the novel describes how war destroys families and removes any sense of stability from women's lives: *War had taken everything from them—homes, safety, and even hope* (Shakib, 2001, p. XX). Clearly, this passage demonstrates that war functions as a structural force that deepens women's marginalization. Furthermore, this depiction aligns with earlier studies which argue that armed conflict often reinforces gender inequality and social instability (Moghadam, 2002).

Third, the analysis revealed that the misinterpretation of religion is also used to justify women's oppression in the novel. Religious authority is portrayed as being controlled by male figures who interpret religious teachings according to their own interests. Consequently, women are denied the opportunity to interpret religion independently. In other words, religion becomes a tool that maintains male dominance rather than promoting justice or equality. Similarly, earlier research has suggested that patriarchal interpretations of religion frequently reinforce gender inequality within traditional societies (Kandiyoti, 2007).

Moreover, the study examined how female voices are silenced through what Spivak describes as structural barriers to communication. According to Spivak (1988), the subaltern may attempt to speak; however, dominant social structures prevent their voices from being heard. In the novel, female characters attempt to express their suffering and frustration; nevertheless, their voices are often ignored or dismissed by male authority figures. For example, the protagonist repeatedly expresses fear and emotional pain; yet, her concerns receive little attention from the people around her. Thus, this situation reflects the concept of *noise* in communication, where social and cultural barriers prevent meaningful dialogue between the speaker and the listener.

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Therefore, the analysis demonstrates that Afghan women in the novel are not only oppressed socially but also silenced discursively. As a result, their experiences remain unheard because the social system does not allow them to speak freely.

Finally, the implications of these findings reveal that the novel presents a powerful critique of patriarchal and cultural systems that silence women. Indeed, the narrative demonstrates that female subalternity is produced through the interaction of multiple forces including patriarchy, war, and religious misinterpretation. Furthermore, these findings address the research gap identified earlier in the study. Previous scholarship often focused mainly on the socio-political realities of Afghan women; however, this research shows that literary narratives can also reveal the deeper mechanisms through which women are silenced and marginalized. Moreover, the study demonstrates that subaltern theory provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the representation of oppressed women in literature. Therefore, the analysis confirms that Afghan women in Shakib's novel occupy a subaltern position where their voices are systematically suppressed by dominant social structures. In conclusion, the narrative not only portrays women's suffering but also exposes the social and cultural systems that produce and maintain their marginalization.

Conclusion

This study examined the representation of female subalternity and oppression in Shakib's *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*. The analysis demonstrated that Afghan women were portrayed as marginalized subjects whose lives were controlled by patriarchal traditions, war, and religious authority. The study also showed that female characters frequently experienced silencing and loss of voice within the narrative.

Furthermore, the research applied Spivak's concept of the subaltern to interpret how women's voices were suppressed by dominant social structures. The findings confirmed that the novel presents Afghan women as subaltern figures who struggle to express their experiences in a society that denies them agency.

These results contribute to feminist and postcolonial literary criticism by addressing the research gap regarding the representation of Afghan women in literature. The study also demonstrates that literary narratives can reveal the complex interaction between gender, power, and culture.

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Future research may expand this analysis by examining other Afghan literary texts or comparing Shakib's work with narratives from different postcolonial contexts. Such studies may provide deeper insights into how literature represents marginalized voices across cultures.

Findings / Results

The main findings of the study are summarized below:

- Afghan women in the novel are shown as powerless and their voices are silenced in a male-dominated society.
- Women face many kinds of oppression, like forced marriage, domestic violence, and being isolated from society.
- Cultural traditions controlled by men keep women under control and take away their freedom.
- War and political conflict make women's lives even harder and more unsafe.
- Religion is sometimes misused to justify women's oppression and to keep them quiet.
- Women try to speak, but their voices are ignored or silenced, showing Spivak's idea of subaltern silence.
- The story shows how the text reveals hidden systems of gender oppression in Afghan society.

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