

Khaled Hosseini is an exile writer who succeeded in unveiling the war-ravaged land of Afghanistan. He is proclaimed as an important figure in contemporary literature, who in 2003 rose to fame and became a publishing phenomenon with his debut novel *The Kite Runner* which was on 'The New York Times' bestseller list for two years. Reeling from years of strife and colonial oppression and further looked at with disbelief post 9/11 Hosseini became a mouthpiece of the real Afghanistan through his works of fiction which were invariably set in his homeland. His other two books namely *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* came out in 2007 and 2013 respectively and earned widespread acclaim. The theme of atonement runs through all the works of Hosseini and it is noteworthy that the subalternity of the characters acts as an impediment on the road to atonement. Through this research, it is established that the theme of atonement is a recurring theme in the works of Hosseini, and the same is analysed in the context of subaltern voices. There are numerous research papers in prominent journals globally which have explored at length the theme of redemption with respect to Khaled Hosseini. But they are primarily focused on the novel *The Kite Runner*. It is addressed that his other two novels that is *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* too delve into the theme of atonement yet the studies are not extensive. Also, the theme of atonement is not analyzed with respect to the subaltern literary theory which is a significant framework in post-colonial literature. It is a subject yet to be investigated whether subalternity hinders the characters' redeeming themselves and finding a higher purpose in life. The first hypothesis tested is to ascertain whether atonement is an overarching theme in all the three novels of Khaled Hosseini namely *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. The second hypothesis is to trace the subalternity of the characters in Khaled Hosseini's select novels. The third hypothesis is to establish if subalternity impacts the characters of Hosseini on the road to atonement. The primary data is extracted from a microscopic study of the three novels of Khaled Hosseini (*The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*). Secondary sources of information considered are books, articles, research theses, research papers published in various journals, print interviews on web pertaining to Khaled Hosseini and information which pertains to the research undertaken. Atonement broadly refers to purging of one's sins. Through atonement a person makes amends by either correcting the wrongdoing or by doing

good in other ways to express remorse. A postcolonial text, Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* is a tale of love, familial bond, and atonement. Atonement is an inherent theme in the novel which is a story of two Afghan boys Amir and Hassan amidst the backdrop of Afghanistan. Atonement is a consistent force that drives the protagonist Amir and helps him attain inner peace and salvation from his childhood ghosts. Interestingly not just Amir, other characters in the novel too are depicted grappling with their inner demons. It is interesting to gauge that by atonement Hosseini does not always imply an act of amending one's past actions but it also means that the individuals yearn to find a larger purpose in life- something which is selfless and which would eventually lead to a greater good of oneself and others. His second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* focuses on this aspect of atonement as Mariam a woman suppressed and isolated from early on finds hope and purpose in Laila another marginalized woman. Both the characters find solace in each other and as Mariam atones herself by making the ultimate sacrifice for Laila- Laila in turn finds herself at peace as she comes back to her homeland and is driven by the idea of doing something for the Afghan society. In this third book *And the Mountains Echoed*, unlike his other two books the narration is fluid and unstructured as multiple characters- each shackled within the clutches of sad circumstances and individual predicament- look to find atonement and absolution in life and beyond. Once it is established that atonement is an underlying theme in all the three novels of Hosseini, subaltern ethos is explored with the aid of subaltern theories. Subaltern can be any group of people who are denied access to their rights by the hegemonic power. Subaltern classes primarily included peasants, workers and people hailing from economically low strata of the society who were not accorded an agency and who lingered in the periphery of the social fabric. The origin of the word is traced to Gramsci though later it was studied extensively and adapted in the Post Colonial theory. It is now an integral aspect of postcolonialism and has been examined thoroughly by academicians and post-colonial scholars.—Subalterns make an endeavour to speak but their voice is not heard and it is often misconstrued by those in power. The theory of subalternity in this regard becomes an important tool as it puts forth the notion that the voiceless and marginalized subalterns are not speaking per se and even if they do, they are not heard. In the current area of research, we would employ this theory in the context of the works of Khaled Hosseini. Hosseini has delved into the political, cultural, and social fabric of Afghanistan to create literature which depicts many such subaltern characters who stand at the fringes and suffer owing to

their social and economic standing. Hence, the theory of subalternity becomes a pivotal tool in the analysis of Hosseini's work as it would help gauge the psyche of the many layered characters which appear in Hosseini's novels. While the research is focused on the theme of atonement with respect to subaltern voices, one cannot overlook the fact that owing to the 2021 withdrawal of US forces, the relevance of this research is manifold. When Taliban was reinstated in August 2021, marking an end to the twenty-year stranglehold of US, it was as if Afghanistan was shoved back to the dark era of 90s. We are at once transported to the troubled times depicted by Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The subaltern theory could very well be employed in the Afghan environment as people were made subalterns not just by the hegemonic rule of colonialists but were also marginalized at the hands of their own people when they were stigmatised owing to their ethnicity. Gender subalternity was also a grave issue in Afghanistan. While in *The Kite Runner* he depicted racial subalternity, in his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Hosseini makes an earnest attempt to represent the repressed women of Afghanistan and delineates gender subalternity. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini pictures women who are exploited, abused, and stereotyped, yet they try to stand against the perpetrators of these actions. Hosseini herein becomes a mouthpiece of these subaltern women and puts forth before the world the adversities these women faced and how they still strived to stand against the injustice meted out to them. In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Hosseini yet again explores gender subalternity when he draws out the character of Nila Wahdati. But herein one realizes that even the most independent and affluent woman can be a prey to gender subalternity. It can be concluded that all three novels of Khaled Hosseini teem with characters who are not only fringing towards marginalization and subalternity, but their subalternity becomes a major roadblock thereby keeping them from atoning themselves. By presenting such layered characters set in the volatile Afghan land, Khaled Hosseini brought forth the idea that subalterns could be anywhere. A country which saw perpetual wars and which was steeped in patriarchy, gave birth to subalternity which came in the way of true happiness for all of them. It also debunked the oft quoted myth that women in a third world country like Afghanistan were meek and probably suffered like silent subalterns. Though Hosseini's characters are fictional, they aided considerably in bringing to the Western world the true and humane picture of Afghanistan.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, Atonement, Subaltern, Afghanistan, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *And the Mountains Echoed*.