

It is known to mankind that literature abounds with myriads of shades bereft of which there would be less dialogue and even lesser contemplation of what we were, are, and would perchance become. No man is an island. Literature is more often than not a reflection of the society we dwell in. The socio-political milieu that we breathe in is bound to fill in the crevices of literature that is formulated with the passage of time. Moreover, walking through the alleys of literature not just infuses one with an inherent knowledge of what plagues the society at a said point in history but it also helps set a moral compass. Not merely prose but even poetry juxtaposes the dual elements of morality and pleasure and lifts the veil from the finer aspects of life. Shelley delineates this in his famous essay, *A Defence of Poetry* wherein he puts forth as to how poetry facilitates the continuation of a moral sensibility:

But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion.  
(Percy Bysshe Shelley 19)

The vitality of literature has existed as far as one can remember and writers from all across the world have portrayed revolutions, the great Depression, freedom struggle against the hegemony of imperialistic powers to capture the upheavals of contemporary times. Dickens brought alive the travesties of The French Revolution in his epoch-making book *A Tale of Two Cities* thereby putting forth the dilemma of those times. He wrote, “Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. So, the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind” (Dickens Charles 362).

Path-breaking works of literature augment the formation of opinion and belief-systems while making one question an incident and see it not purely as a one-dimensional entity but something which has deep-seated undercurrents. It is

questioned and put across succinctly in the insightful research titled, “Reflection of French Revolution in Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*” as well:

Even though *A Tale of Two Cities* is a main social critique, it’s also an exploration of the limits of human justice. In fact, what is the subject “Justice” means exactly? Is it damaging people who damage you? Or is it jailing people linked to those people? When does Justice start becoming injustice? These are large queries. And they are still applicable these days. (Vats and Ahmed 19)

With changing times literature came to be shaped in varied facets and compartmentalization led to the birth of genres which were niche and yet the purpose of it all remained unaltered, that is to depict the travails of the time at a said point in history. Postcolonial literature is one such pivotal area of study which came into being as a consequence of colonialism. The literature that took shape as an aftermath depicting the impact of imperialistic powers on the home soil, spoke to many and helped break the myopic view of the colonized group. Edward Said (Said), a proclaimed post-colonial theorist proclaimed that the western scholars and writers more often than not portray a warped-up image of the colonized colonies. The same ideology is proclaimed in the paper, “*Postcolonialism, Conflict and Education in Afghanistan*”:

Postcolonialism is interested in unveiling histories of violence, domination, inequality, and injustice and asks questions about the fact that millions of people still live below a standard of quality of life taken for granted in the West. In this manner, postcolonial theories address various issues, from workers or class struggles, to questions of race, gender and culture. The term “post” is rather an indication of continuity to help recognize ongoing structures of power. Postcolonialism allows us to critic contemporary politics by taking what Antonio Gramsci calls a “subaltern” point of view (groups silenced by the hegemonic structure of the dominant culture). Such an opening has allowed for subalterns to recover a certain historical agency that had remained invisible while history was written, excluding struggles other than those of the dominant classes. (Pascale 8-9)

It is in this regard that the research at hand becomes pivotal as it aims to take into account the works of Khaled Hosseini who as an exile writer succeeded in unveiling the war-ravaged land of Afghanistan. Reeling under years of strife and colonial oppression and further looked at with disbelief post 9/11 Hosseini became a mouth piece of the real Afghanistan through his works of fiction which were invariably set in his homeland. In all his novels he has deftly delineated the plight of the subalterns. The theme of atonement runs through in all the works of Hosseini and it is noteworthy that the subalternity of the characters act as an impediment on the road to atonement. Through this research the researcher would therefore make an attempt to establish that the theme of atonement is a recurring theme in the works of Hosseini and analyse the same in the context of subaltern voices.

### **1.1 Khaled Hosseini: A Brief Biography**

Born on March 4 1965, Khaled Hosseini, is a prominent Afghan American novelist as well as a physician who moved from Afghanistan to California, the United States of America, at the age of fifteen where he and his family were granted political asylum. Khaled Hosseini was born in a middle-class family in Kabul, Afghanistan. His father was a diplomat and his mother was a Persian language teacher. In the year 1970, Hosseini along with his family moved to Iran where his father worked for the Embassy of Afghanistan. In 1976, when Hosseini was eleven, his father moved the family to Paris, France. In 1978, the Saur Revolution broke out, in which People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power. In 1980, the outbreak of the Soviet War in Afghanistan further hindered the family's homecoming. The volatile environment in Afghanistan led to the family seeking political asylum in the US. Hosseini was fifteen when the family took refuge in the US. As a teenager it was difficult for him to cope up in a new country and culture. Hosseini has mentioned the same in an interview:

I was 15 when I moved to the U.S., went straight into high school, and you know, for me, I think the adjustment was difficult because of the age. You know, being a teen is difficult anyway. But I think it was an even more difficult adjustment for my parents to be uprooted and to have lost everything they had worked their lives for, and to have to restart their lives essentially from scratch and to try to restart a life in an environment that was dramatically

different from the one they were accustomed to. That said, I think they also had a very healthy sense of perspective in that we were among the extremely fortunate Afghans who were allowed to restart our lives in America, whereas millions of Afghans ended up living in refugee camps in Pakistan, lived as laborers in Iran or elsewhere in the world. So, we were quite, quite fortunate. (RFE/RL)

Later, in 1988, Hosseini earned a bachelor's degree in biology, followed by an MD from the University of California San Diego School of Medicine in 1993. He practiced medicine for more than ten years before taking up writing full-time. Through his novels, Hosseini has delineated Afghanistan traversing through its battered history and has brought to the forefront the travesties of the land and the violence faced by the people. An Afghan born American writer he has remarkably aided in debunking the myths about Afghanistan which was for long alienated from the Western eye. As he himself remarked:

Most readers have come away with a sense of empathy for Afghanistan and its people; there's been awareness of the richness of its culture, its heritage and its history. And as a result of connecting with the characters of my novels, they have achieved a more nuanced understanding of Afghanistan, and they certainly feel a sense of personal stake when they hear about an Afghan village being bombed. I've received emails and letters to this effect. So, many of these fears are unfounded. And I think by and large, I hope my novels have raised the profile of Afghanistan in a constructive and hopefully instructive. (Ali)

He is more often than not 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. It is fascinating to know that *The Kite Runner* which established Hosseini as a writer par excellence was initially conceived as a short story. Hosseini was aghast when he came to know about the Taliban banning the sport of kite-flying. He narrates as to what inspired him to write what later would become the hugely successful *The Kite Runner* in an interview:

Well, the storyline itself was fairly fictional, although, you know, I was watching a news story in the spring of 1999 on television, and this news story was about the Taliban. And it was talking about all the different impositions that the Taliban had placed on the Afghan people. And at some point, along the line, it mentioned that they had banned the sport of kite-flying which kind of struck a personal chord for me, because as a boy I grew up in Kabul with all my cousins and friends flying kites. So, I sat down after that news story and wrote a 25-page short story about two boys in Kabul flying kites, and it became this kind of a much darker, more involved tale that I had anticipated. A couple of years later, in March of 2001, I rediscovered the short story in my garage, essentially, and it kind of became the inspiration for the novel. And I kind of sat down and began expanding the short story into a book, which eventually became *The Kite Runner*, the novel.” (RFE/RL)

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. All his novels explore the bruised milieu of Afghanistan. He through his characters focuses the overarching theme of atonement, love, and sacrifice. This overarching theme of redemption determine how the characters in Hosseini’s books embark on their life journeys in a constant bid to at times atone while at times reconcile with the past and present. Hosseini has confessed that he has grappled with “survivor’s guilt” being far removed from his homeland which was perennially wrought with war and violence. He moved away while the fellow brethren went through hell and are still suffering and fighting violence and injustice every day. But it would not be an exaltation of sorts when one cites that he brought alive the social and political upheavals of Afghanistan and the traumatized face of the Afghan citizen during the Soviet conquest to the Taliban reign in a manner that it hardly appeared far removed from reality. His characters which often encompass over generations and cross continents are perpetually stuck in the rigmarole of finding atonement from their past deeds which predominantly stem out of the social fabric in which they are indistinguishably knitted. Atonement is thus a common trail which meanders through the novels of Hosseini and thus it is implausible to analyze his works in isolation with the theme of atonement. It is this aspect which channelizes the actions of the

characters in his novels and which makes the study a pertinent one. The undercurrents of militancy and subjugation become an intrinsic force in the characters' quest for atonement.

## 1.2 His Novels

### The Kite Runner

Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* tells the enduring tale of friendship between Amir (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 12) and Hassan (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 2). Amir an affluent Pashtun and Hassan the son of a servant and one hailing from the socially and economically inferior Hazara tribe forge bonds of amity. But, an unfortunate act of sexual molestation, Amir's consequent shame and the fact that he chose not to stand up for his friend forms the edifice on which the novel progresses. This incident wherein Amir stood as a mute spectator while his friend was being molested, rankles him and like an infected wound festers his heart for years to come. The following excerpt signifies the deep and all-pervasive impact of the untoward event in Amir's life:

Hassan knew I 'd seen everything in that alley, that I stood there and done nothing. He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again, maybe for the last time. I loved him in that moment, loved him more than I'd ever loved anyone, and I wanted to tell them all that I was the snake in the grass, the monster in the lake. I wasn 't worthy of this sacrifice. I was a liar, a cheat, and a thief. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 105)

He was there in the hand-washed and ironed clothes on the cane-seat chair, in the warm slippers left outside my door, in the wood already burning in the stove when I came down for breakfast. Everywhere I turned, I saw signs of his loyalty, his goddamn unwavering loyalty. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 89)

Thus, betrayal and the eventual quest for atonement are the two themes that run parallelly in this novel. Hassan's loyalty and his silence acceptance of the molestation meted out to him, unnerves Amir further. The protagonist Amir grapples with a sense of guilt quite early on in his life when he deems himself responsible for his mother's death who had passed away after giving birth to him. As is evident in the following lines:

Because the truth of it was, I always felt like Baba hated me a little. And why not? After all, I had killed his beloved wife, his beautiful princess, hadn't I? The least I could have done was to have had the decency to have turned out a little more like him. But I hadn't turned out like him. Not at all. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 17)

Ananya Mishra also points out as to how guilt and the consequent yearning to atone oneself impacts the life of a protagonist remarkably:

The great tragedies carry in them an overwhelming sense of guilt: the unbearable guilt of incest in Sophocles 'Oedipus Rex and the guilt of murder in Shakespeare 's Hamlet and Dostoevsky 's Crime and Punishment. The sense of guilt the protagonists felt owing to a crime committed at some point in their adulthood changes the course of their lives. It either brings about their downfall or they spend the rest of their lifetime trying to find redemption. (Mishra 65)

Amir in *The Kite Runner* is a striking case of how guilt can make one suffer throughout one's life journey. He feels guilty of being instrumental in the death of his mother which he felt was the reason behind his father's indifference towards him and later he is wrecked with the burden of not standing up for his friend. Thus, atonement for him becomes something which would lead to absolution of one's sins and thereby lead to happiness. The paper 'Superego Guilt, Redemption and Atonement in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*' discusses Amir's moral dilemma at length:

In *The Kite Runner*, the protagonist betrays his best friend. Amir is presumed to have put a wall surrounding Hassan against the aggression of Assef. The abandonment of Hassan in the alleyway is the height of this betrayal. Earlier, Amir, in an attempt to separate himself from Hassan and disassociate himself from the guilt, prepares a mischievous scheme with the aim of getting rid of Hassan and hence of the burden that is making his life miserable. He put forward a proposal to his father to kick out Ali and Hassan. Conversely, his father rebuffed him and notified him of his intention to let the two be permanent residents in his household. It will be useful to give a background of this trajectory. The absurdity of this chronology of events is when Amir

schemes to get rid of Hassan. When Ali and Hassan left their shaft and went to buy shopping, he sneaked into Hassan 's room and concealed his new watch and some cash under Hassan 's mattress. Hassan was the main suspect and Amir's father brought them all together. When Hassan was confronted, to everyone's astonishment, he acknowledged being the culprit. Baba understood that Hassan never engaged in misdemeanour. Amir believed that Hassan 's action was mitigated by circumstances of love to him from Hassan. He came to the realization that Hassan knew that Amir watched him when he was being raped by Assef. He could no longer share the same place with him since this tormented him to an unprecedented level. (Khadawardi 92)

In *The Kite Runner* Hosseini brings alive the real and raw character of the young protagonist Amir who walks away from doing the right thing. But as flawed as he is Amir realizes his folly and though away from his homeland pines to set things right. Class dynamics too form an integral part of the novel and we are made privy to the subtle and not so subtle instances which reflect as to how the economically and socially backward Hazara tribe is treated differently. Hassan a Hazara boy is subservient to Amir and there is an unsaid deference that he exhibits even though both he and Amir bond like friends. This class-divide is thus evident and it goes on to establish the subaltern nature of the inferior class. Amir confesses to having adhered to this class divide as it is something which seems to be conditioned into one's system.

The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either. Not in the usual sense, anyhow. Never mind that we taught each other to ride a bicycle with no hands, or to build a fully functional homemade camera out of a cardboard box. Never mind that we spent an entire winter flying kites. Never mind that to me, the face of Afghanistan is that of a boy with a thin-boned frame, a shaved head, and low-set ears, a boy with Chinese doll face perpetually lit by a hare lipped smile. Never mind any of those things. Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 22).



Hosseini himself cites that he made a conscious attempt to depict the inherent class-dynamics that were prevalent in Afghanistan and the unjust treatment meted out to the Hazara tribe. “One example that I highlight in my book is the mistreatment of the Hazara people, who were all but banned from the higher appointments of society and forced to play a second-class citizen role. A critical eye toward that era is, I believe, as important as a loving eye because there are lessons to be learned from our own past.” (Azad)

One can conclude that *The Kite Runner* fringes towards being a post-colonial subtext of sorts wherein Hosseini as an exile writer has made a deliberate attempt to show class segregation and has underlined the voiceless subalterns that stem out from the result of the hegemony of the colonizers as well as the suppression by the indigenous people who hail from a higher rung of the society. It is brought forth succinctly in the following lines:

“Post-colonialism (or often postcolonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as the post-colonial state, ‘post-colonial’ had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization.” (Ashcroft et al. 168)

While we can gauge from the discussion above that *The Kite Runner* is a postcolonial text, it is hard to miss that the central theme of the novel is the theme of atonement. As, this research will focus on the theme of atonement and when we define it, it is the absolution of one’s sins and an effort to redeem oneself. And here at this point, atonement becomes the final sojourn for Amir who lives in the dark shadow of his past acts. Taking the form of a ‘Bildungsroman’ (a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character (Online) the character of Amir constantly yearns to redeem himself even though he is away from his homeland and as the land of Afghanistan embroils in the terror of wars and subjugation, he from a distance stands as a mute spectator with a burning desire of atoning his sins.

### **A Thousand Splendid Suns**

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 Thousand Splendid Suns* 1) a woman suppressed and isolated from early on finds hope and purpose in Laila (*A Thousand Splendid Suns* 66)- another marginalized woman. The circumstances bring them together and they tussle through the labyrinths of their unfortunate circumstances, the violence and oppression faced at the hands of their husband as well by the despotic forces of Taliban. 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.

The book very early on sets the tone and gives one a sense of foreboding that Hosseini would delve into the oppressed and marginalized women folk of Afghanistan.

"Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 7)

Mariam learns early on that she is an illegitimate child, a 'harami.' Her mother Nana is bitter and Mariam spends the first fifteen years of her life in a house away from her father and his family. Though she is keen to learn and get a formal education like her half-brothers the very idea is nipped in the bud by Nana.

It's our lot in life, Mariam. Women like us. We endure. It's all we have. Do you understand? Besides, they'll laugh at you in school. They will. They'll call you harami. They'll say the most terrible things about you. I won't have it." Mariam nodded. "And no more talk about school. You're all I have. I won't lose you to them. Look at me. No more talk about school." "Be reasonable. Come now. If the girl wants." Mullah Faizullah began. "And you, akhund sahib, with all due respect, you should know better than to encourage these foolish ideas of hers. If you really care about her, then you make her see that

she belongs here at home with her mother. There is nothing out there for her. Nothing but rejection and heartache. I know, akhund sahib. I know. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 14)

Later when Nana commits suicide, Mariam holds herself responsible for it and carries the burden of guilt throughout her life. When she is married to an older man Rashid, she is left with no choice but to accept her fate. Rashid is a man who is born and bred in the patriarchal Afghan society and who regards women as mere possessions. He proclaims, "That is one thing I can't stand, the sound of a female crying. I'm sad. I have no tolerance for it" (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 40). Mariam has to bear the brunt of her inability to give birth to a son. Rashid's anger is channelised in everyday abuse and angst. Mariam has to bear his atrocities without no fault of hers.

"Get up," he said. "Come here. Get up." He snatched her hand, opened it, and dropped a handful of pebbles into it. "Put these in your mouth." "What?" "Put. These. In your mouth." "Stop it, Rasheed, I'm " His powerful hands clasped her jaw. He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer. "Now chew," he said. Through the mouthful of grit and pebbles, Mariam mumbled a plea. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes. "CHEW!" he bellowed. A gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face. Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked. "Good," Rasheed said. His cheeks were quivering. "Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food, and nothing else." Then he was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 67)

Laila comes in the house and though Mariam looks at her with distrust, soon the common foe in the form of Rashid brings them close. It is this bond of love, forged under unusual circumstances, which empowers them and leads to atonement and freedom. As is rightly put forth in this paper:

Afghan women are oppressed but they resist revolt and avenged. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the exploration from subaltern to equal gender. Nana is the

deprived generation who points out the follies of males before the females but does not resist, Mariam is declared the 'harami' bastard and she with her mother are excluded from the society and both lived in kolba, which is separated and marginalized place where no one is in their neighbour. Laila is the major resisting force who motivates the previous and forthcoming generation to revolt against the patriarchal society which made them subaltern. In the novel female-subaltern speak through resistance and revolt. Khaled Hosseini challenges Spivak's theory of subaltern, can subaltern speak? She says "NO" but Hosseini says "Yes" and subaltern's voices are heard. (Joyia et al. 106)

Hosseini has yet again brought to the foreground, the plight of a group which was pushed into being subalterns and were marginalized and exploited. In *The Kite Runner* while Hosseini delved into the subaltern clan of Hazaras and the subjugation meted out to them, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it is the women who are deemed subalterns and are at the mercy of the male counterparts as well the political power at helm, primarily the Taliban. In an Afghan society, where patriarchy was already prevalent and was ingrained in the very fabric of the local milieu, the unjust rules by the Taliban further pushed women into the fringes of the society thereby expediting their subalternity. The following paper further throws light on the same:

The female characters portrayed in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Hosseini, 2007) are mainly epitomes of the modern world because they face domestic and social violence bravely and keep on thinking about the use of conventional and unconventional methods to defeat the patriarchal repression and fight for their freedom. Further, they claim that without mentioning any gender, belief, or socio-economic conditions, all male and female have an opportunity to grow in life. Particularly Mariam struggles to seek freedom and love from someone throughout her life. She is alone, suppressed, and endures long-sufferings silently as a subaltern but she becomes bold and begins to resist after having the love of Laila. Considering the phrase by Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Hosseini maintains that the women are subaltern and marginalized by the patriarchal system. They can and will be able to 'voice

out' only if they show courage and resistance along with the endurance of the calamities. (Yasin et al. 751)

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* can also be termed a feminist read though it has been argued upon that Hosseini presented the women protagonists as passive and suppressed without an agency thereby catering to the Western perception of women in countries under imperialistic powers. This is critically analyzed in the thesis by Kazemiyan, Azam, 'A Thousand Splendid Suns; Rhetorical Vision of Afghan Women' and is evident in the following lines:

On the other hand, the analysis of the book reviews shows that the way the novel represents Afghan women serves to generate the sympathy and the sense of responsibility from the readers for Afghan women. The representation of Afghan women as passive and powerless functions to endow the readers in this study with a sense of superiority that is evident in their taking on the role of the protector and manifesting their privilege of freedom and comfort. As such, not only *A Thousand Splendid Suns* serves to reinforce the stereotypical image of Afghan women as oppressed and powerless, but it also predominantly contributes to the discourse of Orientalism. (Kazemiyan)

But in response the above argument one would like to put across the fact that though Hosseini depicts the Afghani women characters as epitomes of endurance, the culmination is such that it portrays as to how these women were also capable of resistance and how they in the given circumstances fought for their freedom. It is also to be noted that they were victims of dual subalternity, on one hand they were being subdued under the patriarchal society while on the other hand they were made to suffer owing to the despotic political powers.

War shatters everyone but it alienates women in the most drastic manner. The consequences of war for women are often more scarring and that is what Hosseini depicted in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Hosseini himself states as to how after focusing on male protagonists in *The Kite Runner*, he consciously wanted to delve into delineating the lives of the women of Afghanistan and the atrocities they had to endure in the war-trodden land:

I was finishing up *The Kite Runner*, which had turned out to be a novel about men — the lives of men, fatherhood, brotherhood, and so on. Even as I was finishing the editing of that book, I had decided that I had to write a second book and address the issues pertaining to women. So, I put that idea on the back burner and just kind of let it simmer. I went to Afghanistan in the spring of 2003, and I met with people who worked for nongovernmental organizations, people who worked as policemen, women who were working as teachers, and I basically just listened to their stories. The purpose of the visit was to educate myself. I really wasn't thinking at all about researching a book. But I came home with this amazing repertoire of eyewitness accounts and stories that were vivid and heartbreaking, and that sat in my head for about another year. When I began writing this novel, all those voices came back and I think the two main female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were kind of inspired by my collective sense of what women in Afghanistan went through, particularly since the withdrawal of the Soviets and the breakout of anarchy and extremism and criminality. (Hosseini, "Q&a Khaled Hosseini")

### **And the Mountains Echoed**

His third novel is *And the Mountains Echoed*, which Hosseini heralds as, "The book is kind of like a fairytale turned on its head. You have a very painful rupture at the beginning and then this tearful reconciliation at the end, except the revelations and the reconciliations you're granted aren't the ones you're expecting. Which is how life is, really." (Hosseini, *Khaled Hosseini: "If I Could Go Back Now, I'd Take The Kite Runner Apart"*). In this book, we come across an array of characters spread out in Afghanistan, Paris, and Greece. Spanning across almost sixty years from as early as 1952 to 2010, the book's heart lies in telling the story and eventual separation of siblings Pari and Abdullah but, 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.

*And the Mountains Echoed* deals with the problems of identity crisis and alienation. The novel brings up the social, cultural, and economic factors for the migration of characters. Although they are displaced, yet there is

something which connects them with their roots. The novel also presents the view that in order to be alienated, it is not necessary to leave the homeland. There are some characters who didn't feel home in their own country. The story of Abdullah and Pari is the foundation of the book, and their story has an interconnection with many other stories told by different people from different nations. This interconnection between different people from different nations is the essence of the novel, and through this strategy Khaled Hosseini has shown how a person feels when he/she is detached from his roots. (Khare 814)

As we know that the author himself has a transnational identity, and through this identity he puts in double vision in *And the Mountains Echoed*. On the one hand he tries to get attached with his roots representing his own country, on the other he intends to have other's experience of life. Through the process of hybridization of cultures, the novel proposes a global phenomenon, and multiple identities of characters. (Khare 817)

*And the Mountains Echoed* is thus a book wherein Hosseini has brought out the filial love between two siblings amidst the tattered terrains of Afghanistan. But he also makes an earnest endeavour to draw a panorama of characters spanning through generations, all in some way connected to the Afghan land. He dwells on the expat experience as well and traces as to how even being away from your homeland you are forever tied to your roots. Though in *And the Mountains Echoed* the militancy and subjugation in Afghanistan lurks in the background and the characters take precedence, yet it is the belligerent forces in Afghanistan which carve the destiny of the characters. It is a novel in which the stories spanning across continents throw light on the predicaments of Afghan people as well as their expat experience.

### **1.3 Tracing Subaltern Voices in Hosseini's Novels**

All of Hosseini's novels are based in Afghanistan and trace the socio-political conditions of war-ravaged Afghanistan through multi-generational characters. As we traverse through the lives of the fictional characters whose lives are affected by the strife and social milieu of their homeland Afghanistan, we are made privy to many facets that make them suffer. It is observed that many of Hosseini's characters are subalterns. Subalterns in its simplest connotation refers to someone hailing from a low

or inferior class. But it has a wide spectrum as put forth by Pramod K Nayar. He states:

Subalternization is the process by which minorities, ethnic groups and communities are rendered subalterns, mostly by acts of omission or commission by the postcolonial state. This could be the Ahmadiyas in Pakistan, the Dalits in India, the Aboriginals in Australia and Canada or the Hazaras in Afghanistan. Global activism in the domain of Human Rights and investigation of war crimes and ethnicides focus almost entirely on subalternization. In effect, one could argue that it is the global visibility of the postcolonial subaltern, subalternized by the state, that ensures at least a minimal pressure being exerted on the state towards welfare or reparation. (Nayar 70)

To understand the implication of subalternity on the characters carved by Hosseini the researcher would also take the aid of Subaltern literary theory, primarily drawing from the study done by Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci), Spivak Chakravorty (Spivak 271–313) and Ranajit Guha (Ranjit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). These theories would form the literary framework of the research. The research intends to bring to light and establish a correlation between the personal trials and tribulations as well as moral quagmire experienced by Hosseini's characters and the role of the subaltern nature of their situation be it literal or figurative subaltern aspect. Also, the research aims to establish that the overarching theme of atonement in the characters of Hosseini is impacted significantly owing to their subalternity. Tracing the subalternity of the varied characters in the novels *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* is essential to get a deeper insight into Hosseini's works as it would lay bare the plight of the characters and put into perspective the socio-political conditions that made the people of Afghanistan suffer. The hegemony of the imperial power led to exploitation of the natives and it has been observed that the dialogue that comes out of the colonizer is very often coloured and not representative of the real sentiment of the colonized masses. Thus, by unearthing the voices that are hitherto suppressed and shoved into oblivion, one can understand the consequences of the oppression in the true sense. In the context of Hosseini, though fiction, one cannot overlook the fact that his stories depict the Afghan socio-political era through the



lives of Afghan characters. Hence, gauging their subalternity would give voice to the voiceless forces of the war-ravaged Afghan land.

#### **1.4 Hosseini as a Writer in Exile**

Before embarking on the journey of understanding and critically examining Khaled Hosseini's works and digging deep into them, it is imperative to know his identity and his background. A writer's life often seeps into his works and when it is writing about his homeland from a place far-removed from the home-soil it becomes even more convoluted. A writer in exile has a specific sense of sensibility when he puts into words the realities of his homeland. A diasporic writer has an invisible baggage that he carries all along while attempting to stay true to his art as he reaches out to hold the thread-bare remains of his memory of a country that he left long ago. Anwesa Chattopadhyay discusses the elements of diasporic writing in her enlightening paper and argues that the term 'diaspora' has a broadened definition:

Safran presents the following characteristics that the members of expatriate minority communities are found to share. These include: dispersal from a center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions; retention of collective memory, vision, or myth; the belief that complete acceptance by the host country is not possible with a persistent sense of alienation; regard for the ancestral homeland as the true or ideal home and the place of eventual return; commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland to its safety and prosperity; and personal and vicarious relation to the homeland in an ethnic-communal consciousness. (Chattopadhyay 2)

Khaled Hosseini's writing has reflections of many of these facets which signify exile writing. Memory is a pivotal element which acts as a vantage point of sorts to flesh out the fictional layout of one's homeland but with real political and social background lurking in, thereby lending authenticity to the memory. Rushdie's 'broken mirror' analogy stands true here and is inherent in all the works of Khaled Hosseini. (Rushdie 11). Hosseini has made a conscious effort to put forth the social anomalies of the Afghan society by laying bare the disparity of the classes. He has portrayed the plight and inequality meted out to the inferior class namely the Hazara tribe in explicit terms. This acceptance and delineation of the subaltern stands out in Hosseini's works

and though displaced and far-removed from the home soil, he is able to acknowledge the class-divide that was entrenched in the Afghan society. Women are subalterns on a dual level, firstly owing to the inferior class they hail from and secondly on account of their sex. Hosseini has brought out this phenomenon in his books and showed as the trials and tribulations faced by women in Afghanistan at large. He has not shied away from handing us the raw deal subalterns are faced with each day. He has made an earnest and deliberate attempt to put across the atrocities borne by subalterns and this acknowledgement is indeed a stepping stone as it not just portrays the grim realities of his homeland but it also opens possibilities of a dialogue leading to winds of change.

### **1.5 Background of the Study**

Afghanistan is almost a living entity in Khaled Hosseini's novels. It is a beautiful country albeit with a tumultuous past wrought with wars and bloodshed. While telling the story of multi-generational characters, Hosseini traces the socio-political scenario of his home country thereby laying bare the war-ravaged Afghan land. In all his novels through the varied characters that he brings alive, we are able to witness a reconstruction of Afghan history. Subsequently, as the characters shift through the travails of their lives on the Afghan soil, we are invariably made cognizant of the fact as to how the country's political and cultural fabric came to be. The paper 'Witnessing A Narrative Reconstruction of Afghanistan's Modern History in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*,' proposes the same:

Hosseini shows a reconstructed flow of Afghanistan's modern political and cultural history through the characters of his first novel. It is through the experiences of the characters (or what they have witnessed) that we, as the readers, see the different events that have shaped the world's view of Afghanistan throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. In turn, this telling contrasts with the traditional kind as it is evidently more personal- thus recreating the country's history in the minds of the readers as they take part in the main characters' witnessing of such events. (James 1)

Thus, while the research aims to trace the overarching theme of atonement with respect to subaltern voices, it is imperative that the political milieu of Afghanistan is

captured so as to have a keener insight into the works as well to augment the study in hand. The belligerent forces that have been wreaking havoc in Afghanistan for centuries have been instrumental in the moulding the psyche of the people at large. They also led to the emergence of stories of strife and resistance which depicted the stark realities of the times. In a bid to cope up with the volatility that prevailed in Afghanistan, the people at times rose against the forces while at other times succumbed to the unjust laws and conquests.

Afghanistan has witnessed several invasions, military coups and borne despotic laws over a period of time. Under the reign of Mohammad Zahir Shah, Afghans enjoyed stability which was later thwarted by the military coup undertaken by the then Prime Minister Mohammed Daud Khan in 1973. Daud Khan's People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan came to power which had strong affiliation to the Soviet Union. From 1975 to 1977 Khan made numerous reforms in the State which involved extending rights to women. In 1978 Khan got killed in a communist coup which came to be known as the Saur Revolution. Nur Mohammed Taraki, one of the founding members of the People's Democratic Party took control and signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. In 1979, owing to a power struggle between Taraki and his Deputy Prime Minister Amin, Taraki was executed. Consequently, Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 to support the falling Communist regime. Amin and his followers were killed in the skirmish and Deputy Prime Minister Babrak Karmal became the Prime Minister. By 1980, Mujahiddins had united against Soviet Union and the Soviet backed Afghan army. By now almost 2.8 million Afghans had fled to Pakistan and 1.5 million had escaped to Iran owing to the massive bloodshed. In 1988 Osama Bin Laden and other Islamist groups formed the group Al-Qaida to continue their holy war against Soviets. In 1989, the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Soviet Union signed peace accords in Geneva, offering Afghan independence as well as withdrawal of Russian troops. In 1992, the Mujahiddins ousted the communist President Najibullah. By 1995, newly constituted Islamic militia, the Taliban rose to power and by this time the Afghan people exhausted by the perpetual wars, famines, and political instability, approved of the Taliban who promised to uphold strong Islamic values. The Taliban curbed the education and employment of women. By the year 2000, Bin Laden was considered an international terrorist and was widely

believed to be hiding in Afghanistan where supposedly thousands of his followers were being trained in terrorist camps. In September 2001, terrorist attacks were carried out against the US with Bin Laden's Al Qaida being the mastermind behind the attacks. Following the 9/11 attacks, America launched airstrikes against Taliban and Al Qaida targets in Afghanistan. By December 2001, Taliban surrendered and their reign ended and Hamid Karzai eventually became the President. In December 2014, NATO ends its official combat mission in Afghanistan. American President Obama had planned to withdraw the US troops by the end of his presidency but maintained 5,500 troops in Afghanistan when he left office in 2017. In August 2021, US withdrew its forces from Afghanistan. Consequently, Afghan government collapsed and Taliban took over Kabul. (News Desk)

### **1.6 Objectives of the Proposed Study**

There are a number of objectives that the researcher intends to achieve by undertaking the research at hand. They are listed below:

- Establishment of the premise that atonement is indeed an overarching theme in all the three novels of Khaled Hosseini.
- Analyzing the theme of atonement with reference to the varied characters in the novels, in the battered Afghan milieu and analyzing their constant urgency to redeem themselves.
- Adopting the literary framework of subaltern theories and gauging whether being a subaltern act as an impetus or roadblock towards the road to atonement.

### **1.7 Chapter-Wise Details Of The Proposed Research**

#### **(a) Chapter 1**

In this chapter an attempt would be made to outline the life of Khaled Hosseini. As Khaled Hosseini is a writer in exile and it is imperative to follow his life so as to get a deeper insight into his works. Other than the biographical details of the author under study, a brief scan of his select works would be explored as well. It is expected that it would help in laying the foundation of the further chapters.

#### **(b) Chapter 2**

This chapter will delineate as to how 'atonement is an overarching theme in the novels of Khaled Hosseini.' Emphasis would be laid on tracing the theme of

atonement in his three select novels namely, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. This chapter would also focus on atonement being an inherent factor in Hosseini's novels. It is atonement, which is the driving force in his novels and also, it propels Hosseini's characters. This chapter would also bring forth the conflicts of varied characters in Hosseini's select novels thereby making an attempt to conclude that atonement forms the edifice of all his novels on some level. It may mean absolving one's sins in *The Kite Runner*, looking for a higher purpose and a greater good for self and others in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and a cathartic sojourn of multiple characters spanning over generations and continents in *And the Mountains Echoed*.

**(c) Chapter 3**

This chapter would critique as to how subaltern ethos prevail in Hosseini's works. Subaltern theories of Spivak, Ranajit Guha and Gramsci would be employed to analyze subalternity in the context of Hosseini's characters. It would be explored as to how the novels of Hosseini as a manifestation of post-colonial literature has characters grappling with grim situations, which are more often than not augmented owing to their subaltern nature.

**(d) Chapter 4**

This chapter would focus on subalternity as an enduring force in the quest of atonement with reference to the characters of Khaled Hosseini. While it would be established in the earlier chapter as to how atonement is a common thread that runs through Hosseini's novels, in this chapter critical analysis would be made to gauge how being a subaltern impacts the characters' quest to attain the coveted absolution. It would be purported with the aid of cited journals and subaltern studies that many of Hosseini's characters are subalterns which in turn acts as an impediment on their road to atonement. Thus, an attempt would be made to understand if being a subaltern restricts Hosseini's characters to attain atonement.

**(e) Chapter 5**

The conclusion would be a cohesive assimilation of results, which would be a deep analysis of the ideas expressed in the previously analysed chapters. Also, this chapter would primarily put forth the concluding remarks drawn from the thorough analysis

of the underlying theme of atonement with special reference to subaltern voices as portrayed by Hosseini in his three novels.

### **1.8 Research Methodology**

Qualitative research methodology and Descriptive research techniques would be used to support the study.

#### **Hypothesis**

The hypothesis tested would be 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 would be to trace the subalternity of the characters in Khaled Hosseini's select novels.

Third hypothesis would be to establish if subalternity impacts the characters of Hosseini on the road to atonement.

#### **Sources of Information:**

The primary data will be extracted out of 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 taken into account would be 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.

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