

**EXPLORING THE OVERARCHING THEME OF
ATONEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SUBALTERN
VOICES: AN ANALYSIS OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S
SELECT NOVELS**

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Thesis**

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2024

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MEHA SHARMA

PREFACE

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*.

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION



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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CHAPTER – II

ATONEMENT AS AN OVERARCHING
THEME IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S
KITE RUNNER,
A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS,
AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED



Atonement as an Overarching Theme in Khaled Hosseini's *Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *the Mountains Echoed*

2.1 Examining the concept of Atonement with reference to Guilt

Atonement broadly refers to purging of one's sins. It stems out of an act of wrongdoing for which a person feels guilty. Through atonement a person makes amends by either correcting the wrongdoing or by doing good in other ways to express remorse. Atonement has a slightly different connotation in Christianity. In Christianity Atonement amounts to a belief that Jesus dying on the cross was an act of sacrifice which was imperative to redeem the sins of the entire human race. It led to a reconciliation of God and the mankind.

“Atonement, in Biblical terms, means bringing God and man at-one-ment. Sin is an infinitely unscalable wall that separates man from God. But, on the cross of Christ this wall is broken and man is brought into an acceptable relationship with God.”
(Marbaniang)

In the research undertaken though, atonement would not be discussed considering its Biblical connotation. When one indulges in a transgression of sorts and realizes that he/she has done wrong, an urge for the reparation of the act of wrongdoing surfaces. It is interesting to gauge that atonement 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. Urging to atone oneself primarily stems from the guilt of having done something wrong. So, it is imperative that one first traverses through the concept of guilt so as to get a better insight into the nitty gritty of atonement as a concept.

Nardjes Kraifi elaborates upon the same in her thesis as she says:

Throughout life, people commit mistakes or transgressions; they may hurt and offend others or even themselves by breaking a moral law and violating the social ethical standard. When transgression takes place, people tend to feel empathy toward their victims seeing the effects of their misconduct; this gives rise to different feelings and emotions like regret, remorse, shame and specially feelings of guilt. This latter is the most painful because it makes them devalue themselves as they lose their positive self-image and believe

they are no more human. So, their inner peace is threatened and all occurs inside their mind. After committing a mistake, taking the responsibility, and confronting one's misconduct is the solution to lessen the feeling of guilt, and this may occur through self-forgiveness and atonement because if a person who cannot forgive himself and lives in a conflict within himself. Then how can he make people forgive him? (Kraifi)

It is evident that a sense of guilt is what primarily drives one to atone oneself. Any act of misdoing which shakes one's moral sensibility of right or wrong leads an individual to make amends. By making amends the person is able to resolve the moral dilemma and let go off the guilt which wrecks his/her mental peace. Atonement is thus an important aspect wherein one strives to be righteous by doing right by the person whom he/she has harmed by any form of misconduct which do not adhere to one's moral or ethical standards.

In the paper, 'Inducing Guilt: A Literature Review,' guilt is succinctly defined as:

Guilt is a self-conscious emotion that implies a specific negative evaluation of the self, focussed on the behaviour that transgresses a moral norm and causes someone else harm, loss, or distress. This unpleasant emotion which most likely appears in social contexts, regulates moral behaviour. It is considered to have positive effects on social relationships, motivation of avoidance of transgressions, repairing the damage, apologizing so that the relationship is restored. (Rebega et al.)

Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis furthermore claims that a sense of repeated guilt leads to therapeutic healing. (Westerink 207–28). But in the twentieth century many thinkers have questioned the necessity of guilt as an emotion. It is questioned whether one harbours the feeling of guilt merely to escape from the rigors of societal demands. In his article in 'The New York Times,' David Crossen mentions:

Twentieth century literature opened a new approach to guilt by questioning its very validity. The freedom of the individual to grow up and become independent begins to conflict with social demands. Often, we feel guilty because we are too vulnerable to these demands to act on what we feel is right for ourselves. By making our instincts second class citizens we lose a basis for

feeling free, and compensate by turning to heroic actions, seeking to find the power to be loved.

In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," Willy Loman has suffered years of guilt because his son Biff, a high school football hero, once found him in bed with a woman. The son destroys himself in order to punish the father, who in turn had been feeding his own heroic illusions on his son's exploits. Biff loved the heroic idea of a father, but not the fallible lonely man.

In literature, the compromise that Freud insisted must be made by civilized man is achieved: the instincts become a basis for communication, not an impediment.

The artist wrestles with his guilt and makes himself whole. In this fashion, he taps the true fountain of morality, and reaffirms man's capacity to choose good and eschew evil. (Crossen)

Guilt though a negative emotion makes the perpetrator think hard about his actions and it is this constant sense of guilt that often directs a person to amend his actions. This absolution or reparation is what we call as atonement. Hence, it is established that guilt is usually a precursor or the driving force which prods an individual towards subsequent atonement. As guilt wreaks havoc the individual gradually reaches a realisation that doing right by the person whom he did wrong by only would help him free his conscious of this gnawing and debilitating feeling. Though this reparation or atonement does not always come to be by making amends and resurrecting situations that went awry owing to the individuals act of ill will. At times things cannot be undone and no matter how badly a person wants things to be 'good again,' it is no more possible to rectify the situation. In such a scenario, would an individual forever pine for atonement? Atonement in this regard has another dimension. By indulging in moral deeds, humanitarian measures and contributing to the greater good of the society a person can make an earnest attempt to fight for his unatoned sins. Such selfless acts of love and service to mankind make him reach closer to atonement.

Literature abounds with numerous examples of protagonists who yearn for atoning their sins or ill doings. This constant urge for reparations of one's actions often becomes the central point of their lives. It runs parallel throughout their life's journey

like a trail and follow them like a shadow. At times the guilt of their misdeeds is so entrenched in their souls that all their consequent actions and reactions seem to be an aftermath of the same. Numerous writers have made an endeavour to depict this dilemma through their works. The article 'Literary Guilt' delineates guilt and its repercussions quite deftly. It also touches upon an intriguing aspect of atonement which is the religious aspect. An individual is by and large conditioned to feel guilt of his transgressions and from his childhood is fed upon this truth that if you err or harm a fellow individual with your actions you are a sinner in the eyes of God. Thus, from early on this thought permeates deep down in his psyche that atonement is the goal if one has harmed a fellow being. The article furthermore delves into the plight of literary characters who led miserable lives owing to a sense of guilt and the perennial urge to atone themselves and do good by the one they harmed:

The Scarlet Letter's Dimmesdale is an example of this kind of self-destructive cycle. He tortures himself, carving his own scarlet letter into his breast and wasting away from the torments through which he puts himself. In Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, Mr. Rochester, too, hides himself away in lonely despair after he is blinded by the fire at Thornfield Hall. His guilt stems from his locking away Bertha, as well as from his deception of Jane, and he compounds his guilt by hiding in his damaged mansion, doing nothing to restore the balance upset by his transgressions. While some literary characters are undone by guilt, others seem impervious to it, acting as if they are conscience-free. In fact, the sense of guilt is so fundamental to the human condition that one must assume something is wrong at the core of those who can commit evil and feel nothing. For instance, Iago in Shakespeare's Othello and Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter* wreak havoc on all those around them, bent only on achieving their own goals, which in Iago's case is power and in Chillingworth's is revenge. Given Sigmund Freud's theory of the id, the ego, and the superego, in which the id is our primitive impulses, the superego is morality tempering those impulses, and the ego is the mechanism that mediates between the two, these characters would seem to be missing an important part of their psyches. Characters such as these, as well as characters whose lives are spent controlled by guilt, can function as cautionary tales for

the reader. Guilt is an important part of human personality, but when it takes over a life, that life may not be worth living. (bookworm)

It would be thus interesting to investigate as to how the yearning for atonement lays bare a protagonist and overpowers his life. As already mentioned, there are numerous memorable literary characters which are remembered through their human follies and foibles, stuck in the cycle of guilt and atonement. Khaled Hosseini's books are about familial love set against the backdrop of war-ravaged Afghanistan. Yet there is one underlying theme which runs through all his works. It is the theme of atonement in its varied shades that runs deep into the novels of the Afghan-American novelist who is known for his evocative and heart-wrenching near-life tales of the Afghan soil.

2.2 Atonement as a Central Theme in the Kite Runner

The Kite Runner is the debut book of exile writer Khaled Hosseini. It was published in 2003 and attained resounding success. The fact that it came out post 9/11 made it a significant piece of literature as it remarkably aided in assuaging the myths that came to be associated with Afghanistan. It presented to the Western world the real picture of the war-wrecked land of Afghanistan. Though a fictional representation it laid bare the long history of wars and subjugation that the people of Afghanistan were subjected to. A postcolonial text *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 right from the last days of monarchy in the 1970s to the post-Taliban era. As mentioned earlier that though it is indeed a fictionalized tale, it is deeply rooted in the political and social fabric of contemporary Afghanistan. The novel can be broadly fragmented into three sections. In the first part we are acquainted with the bonds of friendship between Amir and Hassan. Amir hails from the Pashtun clan owing to which he is placed on the higher rungs of the erstwhile Afghan society. Hassan is his ally yet someone who serves him as a Hazara boy of inferior status. Yet we learn how the two boys are inseparable and how Hassan, the Hazara boy seems to go to any lengths for Amir. The first part also gives us a peek into the life of the protagonist Amir, his Baba at the backdrop of then political milieu of Afghanistan right from the last days of monarchy to the advent of Soviet Union. The first part ends with the protagonist's 'unatoned

sins' which in a way becomes the edifice on which the novel is set and which propels the story of Amir and Hassan further along, only to leave the war-ravaged soils of Afghanistan and end up as an expat in dreamy America. The second part hence happens in the US wherein we are made privy to the expat experience of Afghanis which is as authentic as it gets probably because Hosseini draws from his own experience as an expat who has spent most of his life as an expat himself. The third and final sojourn is when Amir comes back to his homeland to atone his sins and reconcile with the hitherto suppressed sense of guilt that gnawed at his being for most part of his adult years. The novel commences on a note which at once makes one realize the sheer helplessness of the protagonist Amir and throws significant light on the fact that though he has moved on and grown in years, he is still deep-down grappling with the demons of his 'unatoned sins':

I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek. That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years. (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 1).

Though years have transpired yet Amir has not been able to come to terms with the guilt of his actions and his inability to stand up for his friend and half-brother Hassan. So, when a phone call from his father's old friend, and confidante Rahim Khan tells him, 'There is a way to be good again' (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 2) a rush of memories coupled with nostalgia surface. Though the urge to atone was always existent lurking in the abyss of his being, the call from Rahim Khan brings it to the fore so much so that Amir is transported to the winter of 1975 when it all began.

These opening lines of the novel set a tone of melancholy, grief, and an innate urgency to redeem and set oneself free of the 'unatoned sins.' Though largely and necessarily the protagonist is seeking atonement of one act wherein he did not stand up for his friend. Yet it is interesting to gauge the protagonist is yearning to atone himself in several other aspects as well and not merely doing right by his friend

Hassan. Thus, in a way the theme of atonement is deeply entrenched in the novel. Niraja Saraswat in her research paper further elaborates on this:

Amir's "unatoned sins," as they are described in the novel's opening chapter, have plagued his conscience, and cast an oppressive shadow over his joys and triumphs. The phone call interrupts Amir's seemingly comfortable life as a married man and newly-published novelist in America, and launches an epic journey back to Afghanistan in search of redemption.... Amir is a cultural hybrid which makes him distinct and unique. Thus, the novel revolves around the central axiom of personal selves permeated by political prejudices and permutations. (Saraswat)

Juan Du in his research titled, 'A Journey of Self-Actualization of Amir in *The Kite Runner*' argues that, *The Kite Runner* not only "shows a person's spiritual growth but also the history of the soul of a nation, and of a country's suffering." (Du 100)

Adopting the format of a bildungsroman, *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini takes us through a journey wherein we see assimilation, adaption and resistance as Amir lives through the ragged land of Afghanistan to the American turf and finally his final sojourn as he comes leaping back to Afghanistan. Atonement is a consistent force that drives him and aids 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 and come to terms with actions that they are not inherently proud of. Amir's Baba is one such character who too is shown as someone who is working mutely towards his untoward actions. He had impregnated another man's wife and he could not be brave enough to give the child born out of the act, his name. Honour and class dynamics took precedence and Baba could never own up that Hassan was his offspring. Yet in a bid to atone himself he keeps Hassan in proximity and loves him as much as his other son Amir. Though during his years growing up with Hassan, Amir is acutely envious and insecure of the fact that Baba loved Hassan more than him, it is much later when he is has a promising life in America that he come to know that Hassan was his half-brother. And then he could clearly see why Baba favoured Hassan:

How could I have been so blind? The signs had been there for me to see all along; they came flying back at me now: Baba hiring Dr. Kumar to fix Hassan's harelip. Baba never missing Hassan's birthday. I remembered the day we were planting tulips, when I had asked Baba if he'd ever consider getting new servants. Hassan' not going anywhere, he'd barked. He is staying right here with us, where he belongs. This is his home and we are his family. He had wept, wept, when Ali announced he and Hassan were leaving us. (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 196)

Inwardly Baba would feel guilty for his actions towards both Ali and Hassan. And his various actions henceforth stemmed from his urge to make things right and to pay in some way or the other for his sins. It is evident in the following lines from the book, in Rahim Khan's letter:

I loved him because he was my friend, but also because he was a good man, maybe even a great man. And this is what I want you to understand, that good, *real* good, was born out of your father's remorse. Sometimes, I think everything he did, feeding the poor on the streets, building the orphanage, giving money to friends in need, it was all his way of redeeming himself. And that, I believe, is what true redemption is, Amir jan, when guilt leads to good. (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 263)

These lines from Rahim Khan's parting letter signifies that though Baba looked as hard as a rock from outside, he too was pining under throes of remorse and was forever looking for ways to atone himself. Amir was oblivious to Baba's guilt but when he comes to know of how Baba had sinned, it dawned on him at once that 'Rahim Khan had summoned me here to atone not just for my sins but for Baba's too' (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 198).

In this regard, the study becomes all the more pertinent as the book *The Kite Runner* has not just the protagonist Amir reeling under the burden of perpetual guilt which he urges to atone of but also his father who had sinned as well. There is thus an urgency for atonement at dual levels. We are made privy to Amir's helplessness all through the novel in big bold letters. But later, it is also revealed albeit in bits and pieces as to how Baba was someone who too lived a life forever making up for his actions and

redeeming his transgressions. So, when Amir begins his quest for atonement, he is not just atoning himself but also atoning the past misdeeds of his long-dead father.

2.3 Father- Son Relationship and the Constant urge to atone

Amir's relationship with his father had an indelible effect on his psyche. At the start of the book itself we get a sense that *The Kite Runner* is all about familial relationship. Hosseini chose the volatile backdrop of a broken and disintegrated Afghanistan and one can even draw a parallel with the journey of the various characters vis a vis the rise and fall of Afghanistan. Yet at the core of it the novel is about friendship, love, and betrayal. Other than friendship, the relationship that stands out and the one which plays an integral part in the protagonist's behaviour and life decisions throughout his life, is his relationship with his father. Baba as is he called is depicted as this towering figure, a disciplinarian who was valiant enough to have wrestled a bear. Amir was in awe of his father and from his early childhood days he struggled to please him. His poetry-loving, compassionate self-appeared meek in front of the 'six-foot-five' imposing man who drew everyone's attention the moment he walked in a room. The following lines vividly describes Amir's reverence of his father:

Lore has it my father once wrestled a black bear in Baluchistan with his bare hands. If the story had been about anyone else, it would have been dismissed as a *laaf*, that Afghan tendency to exaggerate- sadly almost a national affliction; if someone bragged that his son was a doctor, chances were the kid had once passed a biology test in high school. But no one ever doubted the veracity of any story about Baba. And if they did, well, Baba did have those three parallel scars coursing a jagged path down his back. I have imagined Baba's wrestling match countless times, even dreamed about it. And in those dreams, I can never tell Baba from the bear. (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 11)

Amir's struggle with guilt and the consequent self-affirming journey he undertakes to atone his past actions is something which takes place in the second half of the novel. Yet interestingly, it is quite early in the book when we find Amir stepping on the road to atonement in a bid to please his father. As is put forth in this research paper,

The reader also sees how the young Amir struggles with his inability to please Baba. This inability makes Amir jealous of anyone else receiving Baba's attention, which is why Amir became angry anytime Baba praises Hassan.... Amir often finds passive aggressive ways to take his frustration out on the Hassan, such as mocking his ignorance or his inability to read. Reinforcing the theme of the love and tension between fathers and sons that recurs throughout the story is Amir and Hassan's favourite story, Sohrab and Rustom which is about a father that fatally stabs an opponent not knowing until too late that the opponent is his son. For Amir, the story represents his relationship with Baba. (Jaya)

Amir harboured the guilt of his mother's demise in child-birth. He further grieved that he could not match Baba's persona and they were not alike. He strived to catch up to him only to falter and fall short. To make things worse Baba never feigned any interest in the many hobbies of Amir. There was a generational gap wherein Baba could not accept the fact that his son was 'different.' His comments screamed out of his disapproval of how Amir had turned out to be. 'If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son' (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 21).

Like any young motherless child Amir yearned to atone for his sin – the sin of killing his mother as soon as he made an appearance in the world, the sin of not turning out like Baba. For a naïve boy these were heavy burdens to carry. In this regard, we can say that atonement as a theme is inherent even before Amir stood in the alley doing nothing to save the molestation meted out to his friend Hassan. Amir in his perpetual quest to be in the good books of Baba, lashed out at his friend Hassan in different ways. Hassan thus became the 'sacrificial lamb' in Amir's pursuit of earning his father's favours and appreciation. Amir was well aware of this when he says, 'Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?' (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 77). Unwittingly Amir mocks Hassan and tests his loyalty time and again. It stems from his insecurities and envy as Hassan was all he could not be. Hassan could fight bullies; Hassan was a kite runner

par- excellence; Hassan was appreciated by Baba and Hassan was all what Amir could not be. In a nutshell Hassan was endowed with the stereotypical masculine traits that Baba deemed appropriate during erstwhile Afghan days. This insightful paper titled, 'Sacrificing and Saving the Lamb: Betrayal, Guilt and Redemption in *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini' further investigates this aspect in the novel:

This religious connotation of the sacrifice of a lamb to appease God with historical allusion to the attempted sacrifice of a lamb to appease God (with historical allusion to the attempted sacrifice of Ishmael by his father Ibrahim, serve to reinforce the necessity of suffering and facing one's internal demons in order to arrive at inner peace and freedom from guilt. At this point in time, however, Amir is not yet willing to take this leap of faith and embrace his guilt. He tries to shift the ethical necessity of taking action by resorting to otherize Hassan as —just a Hazara, thus dehumanizing him in order to make it easy for himself to shun his responsibility towards Hassan. As Amir's character evolves through the narrative, he is finally able to accept fully his wrongdoings in the past and his ethical obligation to save his son Sohrab by going back to a war-torn Afghanistan ruled by extremist religious groups. Thus, his —initiation into a path of redemption obligates him to not only seek amends in the present by facing Assef who now works for the Taliban in Afghanistan but also gives the moral aptitude to acknowledge his past without any racist othering. (Imdad Ullah Khan et al. 72)

Hence, the relationship Amir had with his father was a volatile force which pushed him on the constant path of guilt and the need to atone oneself even before he was wrecked by the shame of not standing up for his friend Hassan.

2.4 The Sub-Conscious Self: A Driving Force towards Atonement

Human beings are complex creatures. We are gifted with a strong sub-conscious self which ensures that we are in touch with the humane side of our being. One may wear a garb of normalcy and pretend that no untoward or unscrupulous deed has been done yet the sub conscious self is merciless. It keeps reminding us that we have sinned. It manifests the sense of guilt in numerous ways and one is forced to stop and take notice. One is bound to be in sync with his/her the morally responsible side and take

corrective measures so as to be rid of this searing sense of guilt. In this regard, Amir too is a slave at the hands of his ethical subconscious self. He chooses to shut his eyes to the fact that he abandoned his friend when he needed him the most. Yet his subconscious mind manifests his shame through numerous ways so much so that he is riddled with insomnia.

Hassan's quiet presence unnerves Amir as he is a constant reminder of his cowardice. The horrendous incident which changed the course of the lives of the boys happened on the days of the kite-flying tournament. It would have been easy for Amir to get it out of his system by confessing it to someone. But human psyche is as convoluted as it gets. And for a teenage boy it was a formidable task to confess that he was witness to such a harrowing crime. Amir's is distraught and his state of mind is depicted in these lines:

"I watched Hassan get raped," I said to no one. Baba stirred in his sleep. Kaka Homayoun grunted. A part of me was hoping someone would wake up and hear, so I wouldn't have to live with this lie anymore. But no one woke up and in the silence that followed, I understood the nature of my new curse: I was going to get away with it." (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 72).

Another aspect which is a form of manifestation of one's guilt is the dreams they see. The dreams stem out from our guilt-conscious self and more often than not stir us so as to redeem ourselves and do the right thing. Dreams make us see a clearer picture of our anxieties and help unmask the pretences and humanly facades. As is analysed in the third chapter of the book, 'What Dreams Tell Us: Lacanian Interpretations,' dreams often steer us towards acceptance:

During sleep, we are not conscious and hence our mental defences are weak. Then the repressed desires take the form of a dream. Without dreams, we remain blissfully ignorant of them. In a dream what happens is a gradual unveiling and acceptance of what is being repressed. This leads to a more complete and honest form of self-integration. The search for internal integrity is the true mission of psychoanalysis. The best that one can hope for is a healthy acceptance of one's irreparably fractured self. (Vattamattam et al.)

Just before the Kite-flying tournament Hassan had narrated his dream to Amir. It was about them swimming in the Ghargha lake despite the possibility of a monster waiting for them at the bottom of the lake. Amir had been valiant enough to venture in the lake without fearing the monster. Hassan probably wanted to instil confidence in his friend who was a bundle of nerves standing at the threshold of the much-awaited Kite-Flying tournament. Winning the tournament would be a sort of redemption for Amir as it would have got him Baba's approval and love. It would atone him for he had not turned out the way Baba had hoped for. Though later when Hassan is molested, Amir is wrecked with guilt and he look back at Hassan's dream in a new light:

I thought about Hassan's dream, the one about us swimming in the lake. There is no monster, he'd said, just water. Except he'd been wrong about that. There was a monster in the lake. It had grabbed Hassan by the ankles, dragged him to the murky bottom. I was that monster.

That was the night I became an insomniac. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 75)

The subconscious mind thus conjures up images and bring face to face with the truth which we otherwise may not want to acknowledge. Once Amir encounters his nemesis Assef after all those years, it appears as if his past has clawed its way to him yet again. He fights him and despite being beaten black and blue, instead of feeling defeated he senses an inexplicable sense of freedom. 'My body was broken- just how badly I wouldn't find out until later- but I felt *healed*. Healed at last. I laughed. (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 253) While in the hospital, drifting in and out of consciousness, Amir dreams again. It is a dream which symbolizes how he is no more the demure teenager who was cowardly. He had finally atoned himself and his subconscious-self seemed to bring home the fact that he was devoid of the guilt that he had harboured almost all his life. The bear analogy is another motif that is stuck in Amir's psyche and it manifest itself in a different light when he attains the coveted atonement:

We are in the Sulaiman Mountains of Baluchistan and Baba is wrestling the black bear. He is the Baba of my childhood. *Toophan agha*, the towering specimen of Pashtun might, not the withered man, under the blankets, the man with sunken cheeks and hollow eyes. They roll over a patch of green grass,

man and beast, Baba's curly brown hair flying. The bear roars or may be its Baba. Spittle and blood fly; claw and hand swipe. They fall to the ground with a loud thud and Baba is sitting on the bear's chest, his fingers digging in its snout. He looks up at me and I see. He's me. I am wrestling the bear. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 258)

The subconscious self therefore reflected the peace that prevailed within Amir as he had come full-circle and through his sheer act of rescuing Hassan's son Sohrab, he had atoned himself and made peace with his past. Moreover, he also moved away from the shadows of his father and became a man who could stand up for what he felt was right.

2.5 Atonement as a way to connect to one's Indigenous Past

It has already been established as to how atonement is an overarching theme in the novel. In a postcolonial text atonement has several connotations. It is intriguing to gauge that for a protagonist in exile, atonement also serves as a tool to go back to his indigenous past. An expatriate character is often yearning to be in touch with his roots and the country where he grew up in even if he chooses to call the foreign country his home. So is the case with Amir in *The Kite Runner*. Interestingly Amir is well-settled in America, yet when he comes back to Afghanistan after a hiatus it is homecoming in the true sense of the word. Though America was like a refuge for Amir who was reeling under the effects of guilt. 'For me America was place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his', (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 112) he still mustered up the courage to go back to his homeland knowing how dangerous it was to set foot on the war-trodden land of Afghanistan. This is also thoroughly analysed in the research paper, 'ASSIMILATION, REDEMPTION, AND RESISTANCE IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER':

Redemption in postcolonial literature is the act of a character returning to their own people or another person's culture, with awareness and understanding gained through experience. This is a useful way of thinking about the redemptive process in literature because it allows considering both fiction and reality. A theme common to all postcolonial literature concerns the idea of escaping a history full of colonization and some form of oppression by those

who colonized an area. One interpretation of redemption in postcolonial literature is that instead of seeking revenge or atonement from the colonizers, the colonies instead tried to find a proper way to justify their identity. This type of literature suggests that in order to thrive as a culture, characters need to look at their past and understand where they came from in order to find meaning and purpose. The theme of redemption is one of the key issues in *The Kite Runner*. The redemption process in the novel appears as a solution to the identity crisis that the protagonist faces in the course of his life. After adopting a new Western identity and getting stable life in America, the protagonist realizes that his identity needs to be redeemed from the unatoned sin of childhood... (Aziz and Longhai 312-313)

Thus, in a post-colonial world, atonement is not merely reparation of one's transgressions but is also a way for the protagonist who is in exile to connect to his past and reclaim his indigenous roots. This is observed in the case of Amir who though an American citizen now, is moved by the visuals of his homeland. Memory of his distant past spent in his homeland brings to fore the guilt of moving away from one's roots. As Jasbir Jain examines in her book, *The Diaspora Writes Home: Subcontinental Narratives*:

Memory is both process and raw- material; process as it covers many journeys back and forth as a new subjectivity is defined, as relationships are reviewed and very often cleansed of bitterness and regret and raw material as it is the only reality which has been experienced either by them or their ancestors, that has created them, made them what they are. All the cultural nuances so imperceptibly imbibed and internalised and often fretted against are now highlighted and framed through the act of remembrance- an act which is simultaneously a process of self-analysis, self-discovery, and relocation. It is raw-material for, no matter how distanced they feel from it, it is the primary baggage they have lugged along the route, the context that provides a meaning. (Jasbir Jain and Springer 9)

This cleansing of the soul that leads to atonement is pivotal in a post-colonial universe as it also aids in doing away with the bitterness and regret and brings the expatriate-

self much closer to his buried past. This sentiment is echoed in *The Kite Runner* and is evident in these lines:

The kinship I felt suddenly for the old land... it surprised me. I'd been gone long enough to forget and be forgotten. I had a home in a land that might as well be in another galaxy to the people sleeping on the other side of the wall I leaned against. I thought I had forgotten about this land. But I hadn't. And, under the bony glow of a half-moon, I sensed Afghanistan humming under my feet. Maybe Afghanistan hadn't forgotten me either" (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 211).

The protagonist Amir is also seemingly a mouth piece of Hosseini himself as Amir is almost a reflection of him. Like Amir he too was away from his homeland and later became a writer of repute. The immigrant experience that Hosseini delves into the book also has stemmed out from his own travails as an expatriate residing in America. Though it not entirely autobiographical in nature one can gauge that Hosseini did put shades of him in Amir. He did not commit a sin like Amir per se yet Hosseini has acknowledged how he suffered from 'survival's guilt' quite often. He escaped a life wrought with misery and turbulence while his fellow countrymen were blown to pieces and were at the mercy of belligerent forces. It would not be thus completely presumptuous to conclude that through Amir, Hosseini was in a way looking to atone himself and come closer to his roots. Atonement is not always redemption of one's past sins but it also implies giving back to the world and feeling a sense of contentment that comes from the sheer act of reaching out to your ilk. Hosseini has also been actively working for the betterment of the people of Afghanistan. He has been serving as a Goodwill Envoy for UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). He also set up the Khaled Hosseini Foundation in 2007 after a trip to Afghanistan and the foundation has been since working to help raise funds for refugees returning to Afghanistan. There is often a thin line between reality and fiction and it would not be an exaggeration to assume that *The Kite Runner* brought about atonement for not just Amir but in a way also acted as a thread that reconciled Khaled Hosseini with his motherland.

Atonement is undoubtedly an overarching theme in *The Kite Runner* and it is this element which propels the characters forward. The political backdrop of Afghanistan and the exile experience of the protagonist add as catalysts for him yearning to atone himself for his past sins and to attain a higher purpose in life by doing good to one and all.

2.6 Atonement as a Theme in A Thousand Splendid Suns

Khaled Hosseini depicts familial ties in multi-generational sagas with the backdrop of political unrest in Afghanistan. Though on the surface, the stories appear to be just families struck by separation and misfortune, but a closer look would reveal that they are steeped in symbolism and depict the realities of erstwhile war-ravaged Afghanistan. Atonement is a perennial theme in Hosseini's novels. In *The Kite Runner* atonement is an overarching theme and one which defines the dilemma that the protagonist faces. Similarly, in his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* too Hosseini has captured the theme of atonement though it has been delineated from a different perspective. Unlike *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* tells the story of two marginalized women whose lives are entwined in unusual circumstances. Like his previous novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* too delves into characters who are riddled with guilt.

As Rebecca Stuhr points out in her paper, "If was set in an Afghanistan at peace, it would perhaps have been a novel of contrasts: an urban life with educational and professional opportunities for Laila in Kabul, and a rural life of strict mores and stark deprivation for Mariam growing up outside the city of Herat. Because it is a novel of Afghanistan at war and in upheaval, however, it is a story of shared experiences. The women's lives come together and intertwine with a shared desire for their family's survival. The differences in their upbringing and circumstances become inconsequential as personal survival becomes less important than caring for each other and their children. The story of their lives runs parallel to the story of Afghanistan as the novel stretches over four decades." (Stuhr 53)

War acts as a bitter equalizer and thus two women from disparate backgrounds find solace in each other, become one another's confidante, and together waddle through the human depravities, political subjugation, and incessant wars. Both the protagonists

in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam and Laila become victims of political unrest, patriarchy and suffer emotional and physical abuse. They appear to be passive yet as in when they could, they make an earnest attempt to raise their heads against their circumstances. Mariam who appeared to be docile owing to her grim childhood too does not prove to be a weakling when faced with the direst situation. The theme of atonement flows as an undercurrent and it is only when the two protagonists redeem themselves in differing ways do they find peace and solace.

Simone de Beauvoir famously said in her much-acclaimed book *The Second Sex*, “One is not born but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir 283) Hosseini unlike *The Kite Runner* chooses to tell the story of two marginalized women stuck amidst the belligerent forces in a country wrought with wars and antagonism. In a country where patriarchy lives and breathes within the very fabric of the society, he makes an endeavour to unravel the plight of two Afghani women. While the women stumble through their lives, and look for atonement and a purpose to their sad lives, we realize that the fact that they are born women in a parochial society is what makes their lives much worse. When the Taliban takes over, and Sharia law is imposed their position in the society is dwarfed and they are left to be mere pawns in the hands of their male counterparts. Thus, herein we find Simone de Beauvoir’s statement much apt. Women may physically and biologically be born different than men. But by ascribing them the feminine title, society has pushed them in the periphery to be assumed as a ‘second sex.’ This action further gave them gender specific roles and expected them to behave in a certain manner. Mariam is a demure woman who was conditioned to bear the atrocities of the world at large owing to her illegitimate birth. But Laila is depicted as a rebel, an educated girl who was told by her father to be something and do something worthwhile. Yet both in the end look to redeem themselves and find themselves suffering and at the mercy of their husband. They do find a higher purpose and atonement follows yet the road which they must tread to reach that sojourn is thorny.

2.7 Mairam’s Guilt and Eventual Sense of Atonement

Mariam is one of the pivotal characters in the novel. And in her one finds someone who is an epitome of resilience. Treading through a life which is never fair, she finds her a peaceful sojourn when she offers herself in one final act of sacrifice. The very

first chapter sets the tone and tells one about the quagmire of the protagonist Mariam. Mariam is the daughter of Nana who is a disgruntled woman owing to the fact that she was impregnated and later abandoned by an upper-class man Jalil. Mariam is bitter because she is forced to mother an illegitimate child almost single-handedly. She is ostracized from the society and lives away from Jalil and his family. She in turn vents out her angst and frustration over Mariam quite early on. The very first chapter portrays the grim reality of Mariam's sad childhood. She is made well-aware of the fact that she is a '*harami*,' an unwanted illegitimate child:

At the time, Mariam did not understand. She did not know what this word *harami* -bastard- meant. Nor was she old enough to appreciate the injustice, to see that it is the creators of the *harami* who are culpable, not the *harami*, whose only sin is being born. Mariam did surmise, by the way Nana said the word, that it was an ugly loathsome thing to be a *harami*., like an insect, like the scurrying cockroaches Nana was always cursing and sweeping out of the *kolba*. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 4)

Like Amir in *The Kite Runner*, Mariam is also saddened by the fact that by being born she not only burdened her mother but also made life difficult for those around her. This is a huge weight to carry for a little girl. And Mariam thus grows up knowing that she did not deserve happiness and love like any other normal being. She and her mother were like weeds which were 'something you rip out and toss aside' (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 8). Guilt is the stepping stone to the quest for atonement. Harboring guilt for one's deeds is something which makes one yearn for atonement so as to absolve oneself of the perpetual sense of wrong-doing. In this case Mariam is merely five years old when the guilt of being a *harami* is thrust upon her. Thereon life becomes only formidable for her. Her father Jalil's weekly visit is the only time when she feels loved and wanted. Despite Nana's accusations against Jalil, Mariam continues to dote on her father. She is too naïve and clueless to question as to who was in the right- her mother or father?

Not just Mariam, Jalil too was reeling under the guilt of abandoning his daughter. He was not brave enough to give his daughter, borne out of wedlock from a lowly housekeeper, the rightful position in his home and in the society at large. Thus, he too

looked to make amends for his cowardice. Providing a small house with basic amenities along with the weekly visits to his daughter, was his way of atoning for his actions:

Jalil put in a new cast-iron stove for the winter and stacked logs of chopped wood behind the kolba. He added a tandoor outside for making bread and a chicken coop with a fence around it. He brought a few sheep, built them a feeding trough. He had Farhad and Muhsin dig a deep hole a hundred yards outside the circle of willows and built an outhouse over it. Jalil could have hired labourers to build the kolba, Nana said, but he didn't. "His idea of penance." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 10)

Jalil is conditioned to not openly accept Mariam as his daughter. His social stature would be shaken if at all he were to bring his illegitimate child to stay with him. Despite that as a human being he must be guilt-stricken. He strives to atone himself and it is manifested through small gestures. Every month he sends two of his sons to fill Nana's *kolba* with ration. He could have sent his servants to do the task given the fact that he was affluent enough. Yet he chose to send his sons push a wheelbarrow all the way to the *kolba* to provide supplies to Nana and Mariam. It is evident thus that Jalil is depicted as a flawed character, yet he too was capable of displaying an urge to atone for his actions.

Towards the end we find the Jalil despite his unforgivable actions against his daughter, is regretful to the core. He asks for forgiveness through a letter and keeps aside some money for Mariam hoping that one day she would come home and atone him of his sins. But it is Laila who discovers the letter long after Mariam is dead. And Jalil too has passed away by then. Hence, he dies yearning for his daughter's forgiveness and in turn his salvation:

You were a good daughter, Mariam jo, and I cannot ever think of you without feeling shame and regret. Regret... When it comes to you, Mariam jo, I have oceans of it. I regret that I did not see you the day you came to Herat. I regret that I did not open the door and take you in. I regret that I did not make you a daughter to me, that I let you live in that place for all those years. And for what? Fear of losing face? Of staining my so-called good name? How little

those things matter to me now after all the loss, all the terrible things I have seen in this cursed war. But now, of course, it is too late. Perhaps this is just punishment for those who have been heartless, to understand only when nothing can be undone. Now all I can do is say that you were a good daughter, Mariam jo, and that I never deserved you. Now all I can do is ask for your forgiveness. So forgive me, Mariam jo. Forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 358)

Mariam is shown to be conflicted between choosing between her mother and father as both present her with contradicting stories about her birth and childhood. Yet Mariam though loving her mother, always tend to lean towards Jalil who was her only link to the big wide world beyond her small *kolba*. He spent quality time with her whenever he was around and made her feel loved and wanted, something she yearned for since forever:

Jalil brought clippings from Herat's newspapers, *Itifaq-i-Islam*, and read from them to her. He was Mariam's link, her proof that there existed a world at large beyond the *kolba*, beyond Gul Daman and Herat too, a world of presidents with unpronounceable names, and trains and museums and soccer, and rockets that orbited the earth and landed on the moon, and every Thursday, brought a piece of that world with him to the *kolba*. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 22-23)

Part one of the novel narrates the story of Mariam and establishes as to how she is buried under the massive guilt of being an illegitimate child. Mariam is struck with the ultimate tragedy of Nana's suicide. Her life takes a massive turn and she is wrecked with guilt for having left the *kolba* to visit her father. Nana feeling saddened and hopeless by Mariam's abandonment takes the extreme step and kills herself. Mariam is crestfallen and disillusioned as her father do not prove to be the kind and compassionate man, she had hitherto presumed him to be. She is married off to a man double her age and sent away from her home and away from the only people she knew. Once married she faces the agony of multiple miscarriages which leads to her husband's antagonism towards her. She becomes pray to abuse and suppression at the hands of her husband.

Part two tells the story of the second protagonist Laila. Laila's childhood is quite different from Mariam having born in 1978 during the April Revolution in Afghanistan which in turn brought the communists to power. She has a liberal father and teachers and girls are not put behind veils during the political reign when Laila was growing up. Laila's only friend and confidant is Tariq, a crippled young boy who cares for her. Political upheavals run parallel in the novel and affect the characters' lives remarkably. Laila loses her parents and home as Mujahiddins fight to take reign of Kabul in 1992. The bombing and the mayhem that follows owing to the political unrest upturns Laila's life and pushes her into a life of misery and subjugation.

Rasheed takes in a now orphaned Laila and gives her refuge in his home. Later it turns out that he intends to marry her much to the chagrin of Mariam. But there is little both the women could do to resist. Laila agrees to marry Rasheed as she learns that she is already pregnant with Tariq's child. And thus, the fates of two women gets entwined. Both these women look to atone themselves. Mariam who feels guilty of her mother's death, of being born a bastard, of being childless, atones herself by making the ultimate sacrifice and paving the way for Laila's freedom. Laila on the other hand, finds atonement in a higher purpose. She comes back to Afghanistan and leads the rest of her life working for the education of the children of her homeland. For her this living a life filled with purpose serves as an act of atonement- a life which was saved by the sacrifice made by Mariam.

A Thousand Splendid Suns brims with characters who lived with and harboured perpetual guilt. Mariam could not till the very end do away with the stigma of being an illegitimate child and an encumbrance to her parents. She curses herself for bringing on her mother's untimely demise. As she kills Rasheed and saves Laila, she finds atonement. To her mind, this act of killing Rasheed atones her. In Laila and her children, she had found selfless love and acceptance which she yearned for all her life:

Yet as she closed her eyes, it was not regret any longer but a sensation of abundant peace that washed over her. She thought of her entry into this world, the *harami* child of a lowly villager, an unintended thing, a pitiable, a regrettable accident. A weed. And yet she was leaving the world as a woman

who had loved and had been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at last. No. It was not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 361)

Thus, despite all the hardships and unfairness Mariam faced throughout the course of her life, she dies a woman atoned. She dies in peace and with a contented heart with the knowledge that her life was not futile. She is able to save Laila from the turmoil and devastation and is able to carve out a happy life for her. This thought lends meaning to her otherwise insignificant existence as per her. It is interesting to gauge that atonement has varied connotations in the novels of Hosseini. In *Kite Runner* it was absolution of one's sins. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, atonement dawns on the two women differently. For Mariam atonement is the ultimate sacrifice for her friend, confidant and daughter, Laila. And for Laila, it is her resurrection and giving back to the Afghan society.

2.8 Laila's quest for a higher purpose as Atonement

Laila as a protagonist represents the middle-class Afghan woman who by dint of being born in the Soviet reign is exposed to education and is not expected to be pushed in the inner sanctums of the house. Being a woman is not a menace during Laila's childhood years. Her father Babi is an erudite poet who instils in her the love for education the need for women to become something and do something meaningful with their lives. He tells her early on that education would not only pave her way towards a brighter future but it is something which will aid her in the upliftment of her homeland:

I know you are still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now, he said. Marriage can wait, education cannot. You're a very very bright girl. Truly you are. You can be anything you want, Laila. I know this about you. And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, maybe even more. Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila. No chance. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 114)

The paper, 'The Plight of Marginalized Women in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in The Third World Feminism' also resonates the same thought:

Laila stands for the middle-class Afghan woman who has a determined place, responsibilities, and ambition to fulfil in life. Through the stages of her development, her ideas, past memories and circumstances lead to conflicts and transitions from patriarchal impediments to resistance triggered by gender equality and feminism....The marginalization of women aggravates her agony. Its consequences are domestic violence, cultural riots and female protests in the policies of dislocation. (Çevik and Tongur 62)

Laila dreamt of achieving something and her parents love and bonding make her romanticize love. She falls in love with Tariq, her neighbour and is already imagining a bright future with him. But she is not an inhabitant of a country in peace. When her parents die in a bombing, she is coerced into marrying Rasheed. Seeing it as her only hope for refuge in a country where rockets and missiles bombard the city in fury, she accepts her plight. Her unborn baby and love child is someone she wants to bring into a safe and sound home. Even before she becomes a mother, she makes a life-changing decision. Yet amidst all this she does not let her spirit falter. She is still the brave and resilient Laila who would go to any extent to pursue what she aims at. Here it is interesting to observe that Laila stayed in Rasheed's house as per his rules, yet she perpetually stands up to his abuse and openly disagrees to his political ideologies. When the Taliban banned women folk from venturing out and working, she cried out vehemently disagreeing with Rasheed, "They can't make half population stay home and do nothing... This isn't some village. This is Kabul. Women here used to practice law and medicine; they held office in the government.." ((Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 271).

We thus realize early on that Laila is no weakling and she would find atonement and in turn happiness when she realizes a higher purpose. She would redeem herself when she is not just a wife, daughter, and a mother but also someone who can contribute to the society and make a remarkable difference in the lives of people.

Hosseini in this novel presents two women who are poles apart in terms of their upbringing and thought process. He consciously depicts Laila as someone who is

equipped enough to have some agency. And she does employ this agency and voice out her opinion which in those circumstances in an acutely patriarchal society and in the despotic Taliban era, is commendable. Hosseini's women are real and not mere caricatures. They think and they resist. Laila schemes to run away and plans meticulously for her departure. She does not bow down to her fate and does not comply to the miserable life with Rasheed.

Later when she is leading a comfortable life with her children and husband in Pakistan, she resolves to come back to her homeland. Post 9/11, things have transformed in Afghanistan. The country has an interim President in Hamid Karzai. Laila is overcome with a sense of restlessness. As implied Laila could not possibly be at peace till, she had accomplished a higher purpose and atoned herself. In her case it is not the reconciliation with the Higher Power but reconciliation with the fact that she did not turn her back to her country Afghanistan and did not let Mariam's sacrifice go in vain:

She hears of schools built in Kabul, roads repaved, women returning to work, and her life here, pleasant as it is, grateful as she is for it, seems...insufficient to her. Inconsequential...Did Mariam die for this? Laila asks herself. Did she sacrifice herself so she, Laila, could be a maid in a foreign land? Maybe it wouldn't matter to Mariam what Laila did as long as she and the children were safe and happy. But it matters to Laila. Suddenly, it matters very much. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 378)

Before going to Kabul, Laila makes a stop at Herat. Herat was the town where Mariam spent her first fifteen years. It is as if Laila wants to inch one step closer to redeeming herself by being where Mariam was the happiest. She wants to probably take her blessings before making her life of some consequence to the homeland where these two women were born. In her *kolba*, Laila pictures a young Mariam and it is a life-changing moment for her a moment which brings her closer to her own salvation:

A young Mariam is sitting at the table making a doll by the glow of an oil lamp...In a few years, this little girl will be a woman who will make small demands on life, who will never burden others, who will never let on that she too has had sorrows, disappointments, dreams that have been

ridiculed...Already Laila sees something behind this young girl's eyes, something deep in her core, that neither Rasheed nor the Taliban will be able to break. Something as hard and unyielding as a block of limestone. Something that, in the end, will be her undoing and Laila's salvation. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 389-390)

While in Herat, Laila also discovers Mariam's father Jalil's last letter to her seeking an apology and asking her to atone him for wrong that was meted out to her because of his cowardice. Pleas of forgiveness resounds through the pages of the letter, "Now all I can do is say that you were a good daughter, Mariam jo and that I never deserved you...So forgive me Mariam jo. Forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me" (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 394). Laila in this regard becomes an instrument in the atonement of Jalil too. Her visit to Herat and the letter acts as a bridge between the ill-fated father and daughter Mariam and Jalil. Though at this point both of them are no more, yet the words of forgiveness through Laila would have certainly brought the father and daughter together in the heavens. Jalil leaves some money for Mariam and though the money is in possession of Laila and not Mariam, one can hardly argue that Mariam would have been the happiest to see it being used by Laila for the betterment of education in Afghanistan.

Laila's homecoming gives her joy and purpose. She and Tariq work towards the reconstruction of the orphanage which had once housed their daughter Aziza. Laila teaches the children in the orphanage and dreams of a better Afghanistan. In living this dream Laila realizes she feels closest to Mariama. It is atonement in the true sense of the word as she feels Mariam's presence in all nooks and corners of the orphanage's classrooms which symbolizes a new and educated Afghanistan:

Mariam is never very far. She is here in these walls they've repainted, in the trees they have planted, in the blankets that keep the children warm, in the pillows and books and pencils. She is in the children's laughter. She is in the verses Aziza recites and, in the prayers, she mutters when she bows westward. But mostly, Mariam is in Laila's own heart, where she shines with the bursting radiance of a thousand suns. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 402)

2.9 Psychoanalysis of Repressed Emotions and the Exile Writer's Atonement

Khaled Hosseini in an interview elaborates as to why he chose to write about the women of Afghanistan in his second novel. In an interview with RheadBooks, he tells:

I was actually in Kabul just before *The Kite Runner* was published. I spent two weeks in Kabul. I met a lot of people and many of the women and children. I met a lot of little girls, little boys and a lot of women. I spoke to them. I know you can. One of the things in Kabul is that you could just walk up the people on the street and just start talking to them and just kind of learn about their life, what they have been through. And I remember meeting these women and hearing the stories of what they have gone through during the time of the Mujahiddin, in fighting during the Taliban years...and I was speaking to them just to learn what had happened in my country because I have been away for twenty-seven years. I remember seeing these women walking down the street with the children and thinking about now what is their life, what are their inner thoughts..do thy have hopes, dreams, are they disappointed...when I sat down to write my second novel, I started thinking about those women and I can't say that either of my main two characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were based on any of those women per se but they were based on the collective spirit of all the women that I met in Kabul in the Spring of 2003. (RheadBooks)

For a writer in exile, the homecoming acts as an act of atonement. Hosseini left Afghanistan when he was a young boy. Far removed from the volatile and violent phases of Afghan history he had subconsciously found redemption in the written word. And though his novels are not autobiographical, we tend to find him clawing back to his roots through his characters. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* too, Laila comes back to Afghanistan abandoning a peaceful life in Muree. Laila acts as Hosseini's mouthpiece who symbolizes hope and represents the emancipated Afghan women, willing to work towards a better Afghanistan.

Salman Rushdie as a postcolonial exile writer expresses his fear that while coming to terms with one's repressed memories exile writers may carve imaginary lands which

may or may not be closer to reality. Their memory is scratched and metamorphosized into a new world which may or may not depict the realities of their homeland. He says:

It may be said that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 9–21)

But despite the question of authenticity which arises when memorising and revisiting the fragmented memory, it cannot be dismissed as something of no value. Azade Seyhan in the book *Neither Here/Nor There: The Culture of Exile* delineates the significance of the memories as an important medium to reclaim history and produce literature of value:

Commemoration is often the only means of releasing our (hi)stories from subjugation to official or institutionalized regimes of forgetting. Remembering is an act of lending coherence and integrity to a history interrupted, divided, or compromised by instances of loss. We engage in history not only as agents and actors but also as narrators or storytellers. In narrative, we may be able to redress forcibly forgotten experiences, allow the silences of history to come to word, and imagine alternative scripts of the past. Our understanding of the present is invariably predicated on actual or imagined links to, or ruptures from, a recalled past. (Seyhan)

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini not just portrays the lives of fellow countrymen and women amidst the mayhem and despotic reign of the Taliban but he also ends the novel on a cautious yet hopeful note. Through Laila he expresses a possibility that Afghan refugees can go back and contribute in the nation building. Thus, though he seems to have put forth a tale of fiction merely on the basis of his fragmented memory and observation, he imparted a pivotal message. As told by

Seyhan in the above lines, he produces literature which is not too far-removed from reality. And in doing so he channelises his repressed memories in a positive manner.

Psychoanalysis which implies bringing out these repressed memories often aids in a person finding peace and absolution. In this regard, we observe that most of Hosseini's characters deal with grief and guilt and bottle up their woes. The paper, 'Confronting Memory: Guilt And The Quest For Redemption In Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns And The Mountains Echoed' discusses this aspect at length:

Each of the characters that Hosseini uses personally portrays a story of selfishness and selflessness, the element of acceptance as well as forgiveness. In addition to presenting the characters engaging in actions that cause them feelings of guilt, Hosseini also presents each character's quest for redemption from guilt, as well as seeking reconciliation with the victim of the said action. Some of the characters achieve the redemption which they seek, while others do not clearly achieve the objectives of their quests. Regardless of this difference, it is clear that most of the characters embark on their respective quests for the sake of achieving peace of mind. They seek this peace of mind so that they can live with themselves again without struggling with their inner feelings of guilt..... The three texts can be termed as Hosseini's personal quest for redemption. In Christian mythology, redemption refers —to the mystery of God's deliverance of mankind from the evil of sin and his restoration of man to the state of grace by an act of divine power and merciful love. Redemption restores man to a state of grace. That is, it restores him to a state of peace and happiness...Psychoanalysis which aims at bringing out that which is in the unconscious world into consciousness is the basic theory that is used in the analysis of the characters' quests for redemption in all the three novels. The aim of psychoanalysis is to —uncover the hidden causes of the neurosis in order to relieve the patients of his or her conflict, so dissolving the distressing symptoms. (Magagula 104)

Hence it is apparent by turning to psychoanalysis that atonement is possible for the ones with guilt and repressed emotions. And Hosseini has paved the path for

atonement both for his characters and himself by facing the inner demons. He may have attained this by creating these characters and sketching their journey to reach absolution. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* he depicts homecoming and nation-building as the ultimate sojourn which offers Laila atonement. In knowing that she made something fulfilling and of value out of life, she ensures that Mariam's sacrifice do not go in vain and in turn helps her get salvation in the true sense.

Though up until now, research has mostly dealt with *The Kite Runner* as a text with strong undercurrents of atonement as a theme, on the basis of the above discussion, we can surmise that in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* too atonement appears as an underlying theme which directs the actions of the protagonists.

2.10 Atonement as a Theme in and the Mountains Echoed

The third novel by Khaled Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* has him narrating multiple stories woven together. The stories have themes of grief, remorse, and atonement at their core. The stories are interconnected and though human follies and foibles take centre stage in this multi-generational saga, the backdrop of Afghanistan's political and social milieu is what affects the characters and directs their lives. Afghanistan has always been a country stricken with wars and political chaos. The invasion of Soviets, the warring spats of the Mujahiddins and the eventual despotic rule of the Taliban- Afghan citizens had to endure all that comes as an aftermath of their country's volatile state of affairs. Like his previous works here too Hosseini takes a deep dive into familial bonds, separation, grief, and longing. Yet here too, multiple characters are shown to be caught in the rigmarole of guilt, yearning for absolution of their past actions. Atonement thus once again forms an integral part of Hosseini's third novel. Though not as structured as his previous two novels, *And the Mountains Echoed* remains his most ambitious project which crosses continents and not just portrays the terrible fates of Afghan citizens but also touches upon the refugee crisis, the expatriate experience and lastly the rehabilitation work done by doctors and nurses from around the world to bring stability in Afghanistan. In this regard, *And the Mountains Echoed* has a much broader spectrum. But herein we would delineate the theme of atonement which is inherently entrenched in the narrative thereby ascertaining the woes and reactions of the various characters:

Distinguishing about Hosseini's narratives, as Ab. Majeed Dar expounds, is the fact that they "are written against a history that has not been told in fiction before", (qtd. in Souissi 492) delineating the cultural richness and splendor of a country heading towards destruction. Hence, by mirroring his life-like characters' experiences - being enmeshed in the incessant socio-political struggles, Hosseini draws the human face of the country that has rarely been portrayed before. Put differently, the novelist confers on his characters the prerogative of voicing stories that fictitiously translate his countrymen's real journeys. Therefore, his characters are archetypes that epitomize and illustrate the life of ordinary Afghans.

To unravel the concealed, yet subtly visible side of Afghanistan's life, culture, struggles, customs, traditions, hopes and possibilities, Hosseini chronicles the differing yet convergent journeys of his characters. The latter's fate, concomitantly interweaved with the fate of the nation, conveys the intermittent political unrest underpinning and channelling the stories' lines. (Souissi 492)

2.11 Saboor's Sense of Guilt and Yearning to Atone

The novel begins with Saboor narrating a tale to his children Pari and Abdullah. The tale entails Baba Ayub giving away his son to a *div*. He is agonized when he has to sacrifice his beloved son for the greater good of the village. He travels far and wide to the *div*'s palace to get his son back. Yet when he sees that his son has a better life in the palace than his penury-stricken days with Baba Ayub, he walks away. In turn the *div* gives him a potion that erases his memories of his son.

The story itself sets a background and gives us a peek into the anxious mind of Saboor. Like the characters in the story, he too is going through a similar dilemma of giving up his beloved daughter. Yet like Baba Ayub he too has to take the bitter pill to ensure happiness and a better life for his daughter. Though the mere act of giving away his daughter changes him. He becomes grief-stricken and lives in regret. He yearns for atonement but to no avail. He not only feels remorse for his deed but he also feels the burden of separating a brother from her sister. Abdullah loved Pari deeply and Pari's separation breaks him. It affects him deeply and the yearning to be with his sister haunts him throughout his life.

Saboor cuts the oak tree after he gives away Pari. It is symbolic of the pain that is gnawing within his heart. The tree represented familial bond and love and after the sacrifice of his little girl, Saboor could no longer see it that way. Abdullah sees that behind the strong exterior his father has a faint heart of a grieving father, "Sometimes in unguarded moments, he caught Father's face clouding over, drawn into confusing shades of emotion. Father looked diminished to him now, stripped of something essential...he didn't tell stories anymore, had not told one since he and Abdullah had returned from Kabul. Maybe, Abdullah thought, Father had sold the Wahadatis his muse as well." (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 47-48). Nabi is instrumental in bringing Pari to the Wahadatis. He is Saboor's brother-in-law and yet after this incident when he visits Saboor, he is given a cold shoulder. Clearly, Saboor do not take this man who led to Pari's separation, kindly. He wants to obliterate any memory associated with the sheer act of giving away his daughter. As a matter of fact, Saboor's act of atonement begins right before he commits the unforgiving crime of abandoning his child. As Nabi puts it, "I will never fully understand why he chose to instead walk from Shadbagh. Or why he allowed Abdullah to come along. Perhaps he was clinging to what little time he had with his daughter. Perhaps he sought a measure of penance in the hardship of the journey." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 102)

But we learn as the book progresses that Saboor is not able to meet Pari again and he dies hoping to repent his sins. Yet this act is something which sets in motion a series of events which lead to sorrow, a yearning to atone and affects not just Saboor but many more.

2.12 Parwana's Act of Envy and her Bid to Atone

And the Mountains Echoed is primarily the story of two siblings separated by the cruel twist of fate. But there are other multiple interconnected stories and characters that stand out as well. Parwana who is Saboor's second wife is one such character who as Saira Salman investigates in her insightful paper as someone who has an 'inter dimensional existence' (Salman). We are introduced to her in the beginning as a dutiful mother and wife. But it later in the consequent chapter that we are made to dig deep in her character and learn that she is a layered character. Her life is not so linear as it appears. Tagged as a 'bad apple' from an early age she is constantly looked down

upon while her twin sister Masooma is showered with compliments and affection. Suitors line up for Masooma while Parwana is ignored by all. This leads to bitterness and jealousy. Fuelled by envy for her own twin sister, Parwana shoves her from a tree, crippling her for life. It is intriguing to gauge that most of Hosseini's characters are flawed and real. Parwana comes across as one such character who after committing the sin of ruining her sister's life, cares for her with all her might. This is an act of repentance and she is hoping to atone herself for her one slip of judgement which changed the life of her sister. Thus, for years she takes care of her incapacitated sister in a bid to be atoned of her sin as she feels she deserves to be punished. "This is her own handiwork, this mess. Nothing that has befallen her is unjust or undue. This is what she deserves. She sighs, surveying the soiled linens, dreading the work that awaits her." (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 51)

Tired of living a painful life and being completely dependent on her sister, Masooma asks Parwana to abandon her and live a free life. And though she hesitates as she feels it is her doing that her sister is living this dreadful life, Parwana gives in. And when she walks away from her sister, painful it is, she feels liberated. We do not know if Masooma knew that it was Parwana who pushed her. Maybe she did. But, in the end Parwana feels free as she not only frees her sister from a life of pain but also chooses to live her own life. She finally atones herself and finds peace with her life. The following lines depict how Parwana finally moves away from the feeling of self-loathing and decides to forgive herself, "Parwana keeps marching toward her new life. She keeps walking, the darkness around her like a mother's womb, and when it lifts, when she looks up in the dawn haze and catches a band of pale light from the east striking the side of a boulder, it feels like being born." (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 72).

2.13 Nabi's Sense of Guilt and Eventual Atonement

Nabi is one of the pivotal characters in the novel. He is the one who sets in motion the separation of Abdullah and Pari which changes their lives forever. This act shakes up the lives of many others too including Nila Wahadati, Saboor and years later even Abdullah's daughter Pari. When Nabi introduces Saboor to the Wahadatis and suggests the possible adoption of Pari, he does not realize the consequence of this

decision which he is instrumental in bringing about. Later, he understands that his unrequited love for Nila led him to do so. Thereafter he spends his whole life taking care of Suleiman Wahadati and in a way considering it his penance. He does not live in the palatial house of the Wahadatis and when the house is bequeathed to him after Suleiman's death, he chooses to donate it to the aid workers. And then he takes the last and most important step which takes him closer to atonement. He pens a letter to the Greek Doctor Markos narrating him his life story and the circumstances which led to the separation of two siblings Pari and Abdullah. He hopes that Doctor Markos would help find Pari and probably that would give Nabi peace and redemption. He expresses his penance in the lines of his letter:

The second is that you try to find my niece Pari after I am gone. If she is still alive, it may not prove too difficult – this Internet is a wondrous tool. As you can see enclosed in the envelope along with this letter is my will, in which I leave the house, the money, and my few belongings to her. I ask that you give her both this letter and the will. And please tell her, tell her that I cannot know the myriad consequences of what I set into motion. Tell her I took solace only in hope. Hope that perhaps, wherever she is now, she has found much peace, grace, love, and happiness as this world allows. (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 131).

2.14 Abdullah's Desperation and Guilt

And the Mountains Echoed has a plethora of characters. Yet it is the heart-rending and heart-warming story of siblings Abdullah and Pari which is at the core of the novel. Hosseini himself underlines the importance of the brother-sister characters and how they take centre stage and steer the novel forward, "It was a matter of remembering that these other characters were simply branches that had come off the main tree trunk, which was the story between the two children at the very outset of the book." (Burzynski)

The brother sister duo of Abdullah and Pari share bonds of love which touch the farthest corners of your heart. Bereft of mother's love, little Pari finds solace and unbridled happiness with her brother Abdullah. He showers her with immense love and cares for her like a mother:

He was the one raising her. It was true. Even though he still was a child himself. Ten years old. When Pari was an infant, it was he she had awakened at night with her squeaks and mutters, he who had walked and bounced her in the dark. He had changed her soiled diapers. He had been the one to give Pari her baths...This was his purpose, he believed, the reason God had made him, so he would be there to take care of Pari when He took away their mother. (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 31).

Thus, when his father is forced to sell Pari to the rich Wahadatis on his uncle's behest, Abdullah is crestfallen. He considers himself Pari's guardian and his only true family. So, it shatters him when Pari is snatched away from him. What further adds to his sorrow is his helplessness and inability to save his sister. The loss of his sister breaks him and changes him as a person. He is not able to forget Pari and her memory hounds him forever- "Pari hovered, unbidden, at the edge of Abdullah's vision everywhere he went. She was like the dust that clung to his shirt." (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 49). In the latter part of the novel, we see that even though years have passed and Abdullah has left Afghanistan, grown old, still the memory of his sister has not been obliterated from his heart. He even names his own daughter after his sister Pari. The sense of guilt and failure to protect his beloved sister haunts him till he is a ripe old man. A reunion with his sister would have been atonement in the true sense for Abdullah. And it does happen towards the end of the novel but fate plays havoc again and by the time Pari reaches out to Abdullah, he has become an old man with dementia who is in delirium and fails to recognize her. But in finding Abdullah, Pari also finds her niece, her namesake Pari. And both the women forge a bond which help them forge ahead in life holding on to the memory of Abdullah, the loving brother and devoted father. Before his memory fails him, Abdullah sets aside a favourite tin-box which used to be his sister's prized possession with the words, "They tell me I must wade into waters, where I will soon drown. Before I march in, I leave this on the shore for you. I pray you find it, sister, so you will know what was in my heart as I went under." (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 400). Though Pari has no memory whatsoever of the tin-box and the feathers, she feels happy knowing that her brother remembered her fondly till his last moments. We can infer from the above discussion that Abdullah suffered and was guilt-ridden for most part of his life

as he was helpless when his sister was snatched away from him. But in the end, it is true atonement as Pari reunites with him and his daughter and through his daughter finds a familial connection with her long-lost brother. This was like coming home for the family separated by the cruel hands of fate. As Abdullah's daughter Pari dreams of the reunion of the two siblings, we realize that though the brother and sister duo were separated for almost half their lives, they finally do meet and Abdullah redeems himself through his daughter:

They are children once more, brother and sister, young and clear-eyed and sturdy. They are lying in a patch of tall grass in the shade of an apple tree ablaze with flowers. The grass is warm against their backs and the sun on their faces, flickering through the riot of blossoms above. They rest sleepily, contentedly, side by side, his head resting on the ridge of a thick root, hers cushioned by the coat he has folded for her. (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 402).

Atonement thus forms an integral part of all the works of Khaled Hosseini. It is an overarching theme which ascertains the behavioural traits of the myriad of characters in his novels, be it *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* or *And the Mountains Echoed*. The perpetual need to let go of one's guilt and walk the path of atonement is what propel his characters forward. Afghan social milieu, the political chaos and the constant wars affect these guilt-ridden characters who are looking to redeem themselves. The redemption at times happens in homecoming, giving back to the homeland and at times with regretful confessions. But in the end, atonement completes the circle and leads the characters to their peaceful sojourn.

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CHAPTER – III

SUBALTERN ETHOS AS
REFLECTED IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S
THE KITE RUNNER,
A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS,
AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED



Subaltern Ethos as Reflected in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*

3.1 The Origin of the Concept of 'Subaltern'

The concept of 'subaltern' has been attributed varied connotations over the years. Its scope expanded and academicians and philosophers analyzed it thereby making it a pivotal tool while delving into post-colonial literature. In the layman language it means someone belonging to an inferior status. Yet later it became a stepping stone in studying the impact imperialist powers had on the colonized population. But it is imperative that before doing an in-depth analysis of the concept of the subaltern and discussing the theory of subalternity, we trace the origin of the notion of the subaltern.

The term 'subaltern' was coined by the Italian philosopher, linguist, and politician Antonio Gramsci. He first used this term in his book *Prison Notebooks* which was written between 1929 to 1935 when Gramsci was imprisoned by the Italian fascist government. 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.

Gramsci was keen on researching about the historiography of subaltern classes and thus in the book *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* he chalked out a six-step pointer of sorts to analyze the history of subaltern class. It comprised of the following aspects: 1. their objective formation 2. their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations; 3. the birth of new parties and dominant groups; 4. the formations that subaltern groups produce to press their claims; 5. new formations within the old framework that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes; and other points referring to trade unions and political parties... (Gramsci 202–3)

Though the word 'subaltern' first came into being through Gramsci's works, it went through multiple interpretations to become how it is understood in the post-colonial ideology. Gramsci's subaltern largely constituted peasants, workers and inferior

groups suppressed by the hegemony of the ruling elitist Fascist government. But the concept of a group which was not given a voice by the ruling party and which lurked on the edges to make their voices heard and their rights accorded was something which acted as a stepping stone to the theory of subaltern. Hence in a way Gramsci paved a way for the acknowledgement of such a group which was voiceless and whose stories were hitherto told by elitist people thereby making it unauthentic and skewed.

There have been arguments that the post-colonial philosophers took the concept of the subaltern as formulated by Gramsci to a different dimension. Yet if we gauge at the theory of the subaltern we would realize as mentioned above that Gramsci's concept of subaltern was further delved into and put into context by employing not just the political milieu of Italy but across nations. The research paper titled 'Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications,' propagates:

Gramsci's standpoint is fundamentally instrumental to any student who reaches an understanding of the origin of the notion of the subaltern because it tends to detach itself from the mechanistic and economistic form that narrowly characterizes most of the Marxist traditional studies. The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. Gramsci's intentions when he first used the concept of the subaltern are clear enough to be given any other far-fetched interpretations. The only groups Gramsci had in mind at that time were the workers and peasants who were oppressed and discriminated by the leader of the National Fascist Party, Benito Mussolini, and his agents. (Louai)

Inspired by Gramsci's conceptualization of the subaltern a number of twentieth century scholars became keen on exploring the notion of subaltern and made an attempt to relate it to post-modern times. Owing to this the concept of subaltern, which was slippery to begin with went on to have a wider scope as was ever intended

by Gramsci. It was linked to the post-modern times and analysed to fit into the contemporary times by eminent scholars. Thus, came into being the Subaltern Studies Group, which was formed by South-Asian scholar Ranajit Guha. Many other prominent South-Asian scholars and thinkers came to be associated with the Subaltern Studies Group namely Dipesh Chakraborty, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak among others. The concept of subaltern intrigued these scholars to no end and as result the idea of subaltern was further delved into. Spivak has offered insightful analysis of the notion of subaltern. Based in the US Spivak has consistently championed the cause of the marginalised voices shushed by the Western world. A feminist and Marxist, she was influenced deeply by Jacques Derrida and his concept of deconstruction. She discovered Derrida and went on to translate Derrida's *De la grammatologie* which was widely read and became a great success amongst students and peers. Spivak employed Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction while putting forth subaltern theory. As a feminist she spoke vociferously about women as subalterns and their role in the contemporary times as subjects of the colonial rulers. She is often termed as the co-founder of post-colonial theory, a title she mostly refutes. Her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak" till today remains a much discussed and intriguing piece of discourse on the concept of subaltern. Spivak in the paper talks about how colonialism has impacted the class of people who do not have an agency and how even when their plight is delineated by the Western world, it does not serve a purpose as it is terribly skewed. She furthermore cites the example of the Indian subcontinent and discusses how the practice of *Sati* was looked into by the colonialists. Spivak argues that women are subaltern on dual levels, one being from the inferior class and other on account of their gender. She mentions in her essay, "What must elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female, you get it in three ways." On the practice of *Sati*, as per which a widow self immolates herself on the pyre of her dead husband, Spivak says that though she doesn't mean to support *Sati*, she wants to question that because the sect of people who introduced this practice, propagates it, while the colonial forces abolish it. In between the two parties the voice of the woman is lost. She is not offered any

agency and choice in the matter. This is where Spivak formulated her oft quoted statement, "White men are saving brown women from brown men." (Spivak)

Academician Lynsie Thompson elucidates in her paper on Spivak's essay:

The English men as colonisers are collectively represented as the protector, the saviour of Indian women from an oppressively patriarchal Hindu society. However, Spivak then presents the other side to the sati abolition argument, whereby 'the women actually wanted to die.' If this argument is rephrased to the more universally applicable: 'brown women do not need saving,' then these two polemics may serve as posts against or between which the representations of British dealings with India can be positioned. Through an examination of various sati and mutiny texts, and R. K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs*, the extent to which Spivak's sentence truly represents the Anglo-Indian relationship may be determined by how far the coloniser is presented as the hero, or the intruder, on the colonised. Although dating from the colonial to the postcolonial (1827-1976) Spivak's sentence resonates in all of the texts, but to varying degrees according to the contexts and individual motives for writing, as Major comments: 'western discourse on sati was far from monolithic... it was also deeply affected by the circumstances in which it was produced. The political and ideological circumstances of the time affected the way in which sati was perceived and portrayed,' Spivak herself states that she does not provide a 'clinching solution' which, incorporating the mutiny and postcolonial texts, suggests that there are other facets of the colonizer-colonized relationship to discover. (Thompson)

Thus, Spivak presented novel arguments which questioned the relationship between the colonizers and colonized thereby giving voice to the subaltern class. As a feminist she emphasized on the plight of women in the colonies and made an earnest attempt to understand the repercussions of the foreign rule on their social and political standing which was already bleak to begin with.

Concerning subaltern, in his book on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stephen Morton says:

For Spivak the term 'subaltern' is useful because it is flexible; it can accommodate social identities and struggles (such as woman and the colonised) that do not fall under the reductive terms of 'strict class analysis.' As she asserts in an interview published in the US journal *Polygraph*, "I like the word 'subaltern' for one reason. It is truly situational. 'Subaltern' began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism 'monism,' and was obliged to call the proletariat 'subaltern.' That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor". (qtd. in Morton 46)

Furthermore, talking about her essay 'Can Subaltern Speak,' Morton says in a rather succinct manner:

In this essay, Spivak juxtaposes the radical claims of twentieth-century French intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to speak for the disenfranchised and the self-righteous claims of British colonialism to rescue native women from the practice of Hindu widow sacrifice in nineteenth-century India. The point of this juxtaposition is to emphasize how the benevolent, radical Western intellectual can paradoxically silence the subaltern by claiming to represent and speak for their experience, in the same way, that the benevolent colonialist silenced the voice of the widow, who 'chooses' to die on her husband's funeral pyre... 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' has been read as illustrating Spivak's own position as a postcolonial intellectual, who is concerned to excavate the disempowered and silenced voices of the past from the material and political context of the present. Unlike Spivak's reading of the Subaltern Studies historical work, this essay combines Spivak's political re-formulation of western poststructuralist methodologies with a reading of the nineteenth-century colonial archives in India. What is more, the essay signals a departure from the historical work of the Subaltern Studies group in that Spivak focuses on the historical experiences of subaltern women, a constituency whose voices and social locations have generally been ignored by the Subaltern Studies collective, as well as by colonial and elite historical scholarship. (Morton and Eaglestone 56–58)

Thus, it is evident that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was instrumental in reshaping an important concept that became the backbone of post-colonial studies and added new insights to the existing theory of subalternity. Though, Spivak is an Indian-born, Western citizen, she has contributed remarkably to the education of her homeland. Since 1986, she has been teaching poor and illiterate children and adults in the Indian states of Bengal/Bihar. She has been one of the pioneers when it comes to literary theories and is amongst the few non-western women to do so. Spivak has also vehemently spoken about the dubious application of the term 'subaltern.' She states that not anyone who belongs to a minority community can be hailed as a subaltern. She was worried that the term 'subaltern' could be used carelessly and for one's vested interests. She believed in giving voice to the subaltern and doing groundwork for the marginalized so as to make them independent. As she mentions, "Who the hell wants to protect subalternity? Only extremely reactionary, dubious anthropologic museumizers. No activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference. You don't give the subaltern voice. You work for the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity." (De Kock)

Nikita Dhawan, an academician based in Germany draws an insightful study about Spivak's notion of subaltern. She supports Spivak's claim that merely by being a postcolonial or by being someone hailing from a marginalized community does not make one subaltern. It is easy to shout from the rooftops and become a victim. However, in reality, a subaltern either does not have the privilege to talk about his/her subalternity or they feel it is normal to have no agency and they do not question the fact that they are hindered from participating in the functioning of society as an equal. Thus, Spivak despises the idea of the elitist class purporting to be subaltern and defeating the very purpose of the concept of subaltern. As a post-colonial migrant herself Dhawan mentions that she does not intend to deny the fact that migrant post-colonials face multiple issues be it discrimination or exploitation. Yet she agrees with Spivak's viewpoint and declares, "What might the postcolonial feminist do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? And I answer with Spivak: We the non-subalterns have to unlearn our privilege as our loss." (Dhawan)

The theory of subalternity though propounded years ago and initially employed for the peasant movement remains relevant even today. Dr. Yogesh Kashikar mentions in his paper:

In, "Can the Subaltern Speak", Spivak puts forth her theory of subalternity. The crux of her theory is that the subaltern cannot speak. The tenets of the theory became controversial as they were interpreted with false conviction. Spivak's theory of subalternity does not admit the concept that subaltern cannot talk. Spivak has attached a special significance to the term 'speak' in her essay. By speaking Spivak means transaction between speaker and receiver. When the subalterns try to speak, the message they try to communicate becomes totally distorted. (Kashikar)

In his essay *Conceptualizing Subaltern Studies with Special reference to Spivak's "CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK?"* the researcher elucidates further the concept of subaltern with reference to Spivak's essay. He goes on to discuss as to how the notion of subaltern is ambiguous and it can represent a number of groups namely, those who are marginalized, suppressed, oppressed, women and children, Dalits, refugee, migrant, peasant community, LGBTQ, proletariat, and other such groups which are exempted from having an agency and are shoved at the edges by the hegemonic power. He further mentions how Spivak has criticized Western academicians as they cannot truly portray the lived experiences of oppression faced by the subaltern communities. He elaborates on this by rendering an analogy of how a natural calamity in a faraway country is being reported all around the world and is more often than not misunderstood. Similarly, when Western scholars make an attempt to write about the subaltern groups, they tend to fail miserably as they are putting out their assumptions of experiences not lived by them. And it is in this regard subaltern studies are vital as they aid in doing away with elitest bias and adopt a better understanding of the subaltern and realizing what systemic imperialism did to the colonies in the long run. (Barla)

As expressed above, it is clear, that though subalterns make an endeavour to speak, 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 that depicts many such subaltern characters who stand at the fringes and suffer owing to their social and economic standing. He describes their struggle with the elite class and thereby gives the rest of the world a peek into the war-trodden land of his homeland. The theory of subalternity thereby 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. Afghanistan has been a witness to rampant bloodshed and insurgency. Various powers ruled over the country and impacted its growth as a nation. Be it the Russian forces or the American intervention, the Afghan soil has seen it all. When a foreign power takes the reigns of governance in a country, the aftermaths are deep. They get ingrained in the very fabric of the country. Just as the colonial rule in India changed the country, the imperialist powers rustled the Afghan land and brought about memories which would be imprinted in the minds of the Afghan people for posterity. Post colonial literature stems out of the colonies as an outcome of the colonizer's reign. Post colonial literature makes an earnest endeavour to put forth the experiences of the colonized and tell the world their story. Various aspects are thus put into fore namely racism, gender bias, class-dynamics, and an account of how the natives were exploited. As already discussed, subaltern identity is a vital factor when studying post-colonial literature. In all the three novels of Hosseini namely *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, we witness subaltern identities in the various characters. Hosseini brings to life subaltern characters who navigate through marginalization, oppression and isolation and make an attempt to resist those in places of power. In this regard the works of Khaled Hosseini though fiction offer a glimpse of an Afghanistan which is trapped in the clutches of oppression. Being an exile writer, by depicting the travesties of his homeland he also in a way making an unconscious attempt to get a sense of closure. Also, it made the world see Afghanistan in a different light as his characters are not mere caricatures but stand out as real people with real sufferings. He yearned for people to see the real Afghanistan and not just a country wracked with violence and

wars. In etching out realistic characters amidst the backdrop of the erstwhile political milieu of Afghanistan, Hosseini was able to mirror the trials and tribulations faced by the people. These people were inhabitants of a country forever embroiled in the terror caused by belligerent forces. Yet, as we see in his novels, the characters though subaltern at many levels, do not succumb to the violent forces but show resistance and try and forge their way towards freedom and peace.

The study of subaltern identity is quite relevant and one cannot attempt to analyse Khaled Hosseini's works in isolation with the post-colonial undercurrents and more specifically without drawing parallels with the subaltern theory.

3.2 Subaltern Ethos in the Kite Runner

The Kite Runner was published in 2003 to wide acclaim as it brought alive the Afghan soil and depicted the people of Afghanistan as real living people. Afghanistan which had hitherto been sidelined by the West and perceived with disbelief post 9/11 was looked at with a new perspective owing to Hosseini's poignant story-telling. *The Kite Runner* tells the story of two Afghan boys Amir and Hassan and the bond they share amidst the backdrop of a war-trodden Afghanistan. It is a story of love and has a relationship saga at the core, yet it is hard to miss that Hosseini's characters are impacted severely by the socio-political conditions of Afghanistan. They are not presented in isolation with their environment. As a matter of fact, it is the belligerent forces and the political strife that remarkably mark the course of their lives. One aspect that significantly stands out is the class dynamics in the erstwhile Afghan society. Khaled Hosseini makes a deliberate attempt to make a commentary of sorts on the so-called inferior clan namely the Hazara clan which was looked down upon by the elitists. Hosseini, a postcolonial exile writer, has made a conscious attempt to delineate how class dynamics governed the political and social setup of the erstwhile Afghan society. In an interview, he says, "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." (Hosseini, *Dialogue with Khaled Hosseini*)

Thus, Hosseini wanted to address an important aspect of the Afghan society and as someone with privilege in terms of economic standing, social stature as well as class, he wanted to portray how those from the inferior class were treated unfairly. We therefore find undercurrents of class scuffle and a depiction of the injustice meted out to the Hazara clan. This delineation of the subaltern is evident in *The Kite Runner* and it is what makes the book an important post-colonial text as it goes above and beyond the task of mere story-telling. It brings to light the plight of a downtrodden class, a class with more or less no voice and a class which is suppressed on account of their economic and social stature.

In *The Kite Runner* Hosseini tells the tale of the coming of age of two boys Amir and Hassan with disparate ethnic and social stature. Amir hails from the Pashtun clan which is a superior ethnic group having a stranglehold over top positions in the country. Hasan on the other hand is a Hazara which is a minority ethnic group pushed on the fringes of the social circle by the Pashtuns. They are pushed away from society and are now at the lowest rung in the social ladder. While telling the story of the love and brotherhood between these two boys Khaled Hosseini puts forth the plight of the economically inferior Hazara clan. He portrays the exploitation and suppression faced by the Hazara community. This acknowledgment of the subaltern is remarkably credible coming from someone from a post-colonial writer and someone who himself hails from the Pashtun community. In his paper, *Methods of Domination: Towards a Theory of Domestic Colonialism in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner*, Duke analyses the epistemic violence that colonies and predominantly subalterns face owing to the imperialistic reign and consequent oppression. He traces the history of the Hazara clan and how they were shoved away to Hazarajat, a geographical region where ethnic minorities were systematically displaced. He further delves into the concept of Hazarajat and delineates how the Hazara characters in *The Kite Runner* are pushed into the periphery and how their own people are instrumental in the propagation of their subalternity:

Hazarajat is a region within the highlands of Afghanistan where the Hazara ethnic group was displaced after facing persecution from majority groups, primarily the Pashtuns. Hazaras migrated out of Hazarajat into Iran following an unsuccessful revolt at the end of the nineteenth century, but “colonies

remain in these two areas...many north of Hindu Kush, where they were granted land.... In Hosseini's depictions of Hazarjat, as well as Hassan's place in the geographies of Afghanistan, situations of the colonized are present... In *The Kite Runner*, the Hazaras are confined within a space that creates these colonial situations. The region of Hazarajat functions as a "settlement" of the Hazara people within Afghanistan who have been displaced and forced to settle within a periphery constructed by dominant groups... In addition, the psychological relationship between the Hazaras and the Pashtuns closely parallels relationships that emerge in colonial situations. Hosseini's representation of the geographic and social boundaries regulating the lives of Hazaras and Pashtuns serves as an indication of dominant and subordinate relationships in Afghanistan ripe for postcolonial analysis. (E. Duke)

In *The Kite Runner*, Amir is taken aback to learn about the tragic history of the Hazaras which is kept in covers and hardly talked about or recorded in books. Having found a rare book that recounts the violence targeted towards the clan, Amir becomes cognizant of the atrocities faced by Hassan's Hazara ancestors:

It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence." The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a. The book said a lot of things I didn't know, things my teachers hadn't mentioned. Things Baba hadn't mentioned either. It also said some things I did know, like that people called Hazaras mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys. I had heard some of the kids in the neighbourhood yell those names to Hassan. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 9)

Through the above lines, Amir acts as a mouthpiece of Hosseini and throws light on the fact that Hazaras were not only oppressed by the elite class but they also fell prey to epistemic violence. By obliterating the violence and suppression meted out to them from history and by doing away with any such records, they further marginalize the Hazaras. In the absence of any historical accuracy, they made sure that the Hazara

community was devoid of any roots to fall back on and gradually the voice of the elites would become representative of the subaltern group. This is epistemic violence which robs a subaltern of his voice and is instrumental in 'othering' them from the mainstream. Allie Bunch extensively elaborates upon the different kinds of epistemic violence and how it pushes the subalterns to the fringes and leaves them powerless. She enumerates three kinds of epistemic violence that are instrumental in muting the subaltern groups and ousting them from their place of power. Discriminatory epistemic violence occurs when the 'other' group is dehumanized and is put into an inferior bracket as was the case with the Indian Dalits. The second kind of epistemic violence that Bunch delves into is the loss of credibility and an act of silencing a group according them the sorry status of a subaltern. This is termed as Testimonial epistemic violence. The concept of silencing is touched upon by Spivak which has already been analysed at length. A glaring example of testimonial violence is when an artist belonging to a certain community is not credited enough and is barred from performing further. Since the members of this said group is not allowed to participate in the decision-making aspects, he/she is at a loss to raise their heads against the unjust action or hegemony of those in the seat of power. Bunch also calls it the 'denial of linguistic reciprocity.' The third kind of epistemic violence is called distributive. It can be explained as the kind of violence which has a far-reaching impact as it is not merely left confined to a specific aspect and affects the entire out-group population. For instance, denying education to a certain group would in turn push away the entire community and they would be further exempted from being part of governing bodies on account of their ignorance. Bunch thus throws considerable light on the various aspects of epistemic violence and drives home the point that epistemic violence acts as a tool that leads a community or a person to become a subaltern. It wipes away the foundation of the subaltern group gradually but with a studied certainty. (Bunch)

In a country where a foreign reign has prevailed for several years, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized goes through a gradual shift. Indian scholar and a prominent post-colonial theorist Homi K Bhabha introduced the concept of ambivalence and mimicry to further understand the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. In his book, 'The Location of Culture,' he elucidates further about the relevance of ambivalence and mimicry in a colonial set-up. He says:

The discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power...the effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. (Bhabha 122)

Afghanistan was controlled by Soviet Union and was for a long time stuck between tension that drew out of the Cold War between USA and Soviet Union. Hosseini in this novel depicts the impact of imperialistic powers on Afghanistan and its people by touching upon the mayhem caused by the intervention of power blocks Russia and America. But, he also at length brings to the fore the domestic colonialism which was existent in Afghanistan at that time. The conscious suppression and subjugation of the Hazara tribe by the Pashtuns was at the core of this book. It is what brings about the central conflict in the book as Hassan is targeted, bullied, and molested owing the fact that he is a Hazara boy. One can say that imperialism works at dual levels. On one front the Afghan population bears the strife caused by the various external belligerent forces. On the other front internal forces too wreak havoc on the people, predominantly on the weaker subaltern section of the society. Afghanistan was never a colony of Britain per se but there were constant battles during the 19th century when Britain looked to annex Afghanistan. But the scuffles ended after the Anglo-Afghan War of 1919 resulting in the Treaty of Rawalpindi which gave Afghanistan complete freedom from the British. (Atif Raza)

Khaled Hosseini in his novel *The Kite Runner* has focussed on the time period in Afghanistan from the 1960s to the early 2000s era wherein he touched upon the fall of monarchy, the Russian stranglehold, emergence of the Taliban and the consequent intervention of the US forces following 9/11. He has explored the hegemony of the Russians and the chaotic and despotic reign of the Taliban. The internal forces within Afghanistan were too remarkably instrumental in pushing the Afghan people into becoming subalterns who have zilch autonomy and rights.

In *The Kite Runner* we have a number of subaltern characters who are rendered subalterns owing to their ethnic and economic status. Ali, who is a servant in protagonist Amir's house is someone who has grown up with Amir's Baba. Baba loves him and looks after the well-being of him and his son Hassan. Yet there is an invisible line which is never crossed. Ali is never considered a friend by Baba. This behaviour comes from years of conscious and unconscious conditioning which makes even Baba, an otherwise righteous and liberal man treat Ali as someone beneath him:

Ali and Baba grew up together as childhood playmates- at least until polio crippled Ali's leg- just like Hassan and I grew up a generation later. Baba was always telling us about the mischief he and Ali used to cause, and Ali would shake his head and say, "But Agha sahib, tell them who was the architect of the mischief and who the poor labourer?" Baba would laugh and throw his arm around Ali. But in none of his stories did Baba ever refer Ali as his friend. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 21)

Though Ali and Hassan are treated with love and affection, they are always made to realize that they are inferior and ought to lead a life of servitude. Despite Baba's liberal thinking, Hassan never gets to go to school and has no exposure to education. He sees the world through the stories of Amir though he has a sharp mind. This belief that people from a certain ethnic group are bound to stand in the fringes makes them subaltern. The lack of education further pushes them in the periphery as devoid of education they are in no position to participate in the affairs of the state and thus they can never question the authority. This also gives rise to a vicious cycle wherein generations go on assuming that it is in their lot to quietly serve the upper-class elitists. Not just Baba, Amir too feels that strangely he never regards Hassan as his friend. Hassan who is his sole companion and confidante is never put into the category of that of a friend. Such is the hold of years of religious bias and ethnicity that one is grappled by discrimination leading him/her to follow the age-old customs of institutionalised bigotry against a sect. It is made evident in the book in these lines- "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* 20) In any society enlightenment occurs aided by education. It is education

which brings the poor inferior clan to stand up for their rights and speak up against any kind of injustice. Hosseini in this book also drives home the point that both the subaltern characters Ali and Hassan are illiterate. Hassan is a bright boy who could have risen had he been given the opportunity to study. Yet he remains a servant following the footsteps of his equally subaltern father. Amir states with nonchalance that Hassan being a Hazara marked his fate as an illiterate:

That Hassan would grow up illiterate like Ali and most Hazaras had been decided the minute he had been born, perhaps even the moments he had been conceived in Sanuabar's unwelcoming womb- after all what use did a servant have for the written word? But despite his illiteracy, or maybe because of it, Hassan was drawn to the mystery of words, seduced by a secret world forbidden to him. I read him poems and stories, sometimes riddles- though I stopped reading those when I saw he was far better at solving them than I was.
(Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 24)

Hassan's ethnicity not just robs him of his right to education but it also leads to everyday oppression and stigma. Assef who is his nemesis hurls abuses at him and leaves no opportunity to put him down. "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns, it always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our Watan. They dirty our blood." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 35). Assef is portrayed as a staunch Afghani who is later the preparator of a crime that changes the life of the two boys Amir and Hassan forever. He molests and rapes Hassan and breaks the Hazara boy. Despite the trauma that follows the molestation, Hassan remains quiet as he is also conditioned to suffer in silence whatever the circumstances be. This makes us again question if subalterns do speak. Most of the time they are silent sufferers of the violence, injustice, and hegemony of the elite class.

Hosseini further delineates how imperialistic forces and the political upheaval that followed in the years 1978- 79. It not just instilled fear in the hearts of the subaltern population but also the so-called elite class of Afghans like Baba. As Amir points out, "The end the official end would come first in 1978 with the communist coup d'etat, and then in December 1979, when Russian tanks would roll into the very same streets

where Hassan and I played, bringing the death of the Afghanistan I knew and marking the start of a still ongoing era of bloodletting. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 32). Hosseini made an endeavour to depict a parallel between internal and external 'othering' in Afghanistan. While the Hazaras were oppressed by internal forces, the advent of Russians led to the loss of governance which affected not just the Hazaras but also the elite Pashtuns. And consequently, Baba and Amir were forced to flee their homeland, leaving all their riches behind. Earning the status of homeless refugees Baba and Amir would cease to enjoy their elite status. Hosseini subtly delves into the atrocities of Russian soldiers and broods at the price people pay in a country wrecked with wars. Baba who is a righteous man objects to a Russian soldier's attempt to rape a fellow Afghan woman. But the Russian soldier is quick to answer that, "There is no shame in war." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 100) One can see the futility of war through the many instances narrated in the book. Hosseini also does not present a lopsided view of things. He wants to tell the readers that even the warring forces are humans and like anybody they too are puppets in the hands of a power-drunk governance. One of the Russian soldiers says, "Russia sends them here to fight...But they are just boys, and when they come here, they find the pleasure of drug." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 102)

In America Baba and Amir start their lives afresh. Baba has a hard time adjusting to an alien country, moving away from his culture, and most importantly accepting the fact that he is no more an affluent elite. Amir on the other hand finds solace in America as for him it is "Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins. If for nothing else, for that, I embraced America." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 119) Baba who was a revered and imposing personality in Afghanistan, is dwindled and becomes powerless. He is agitated when he is asked to show his ID card at a shop- "He wants to see my license...Almost two years we've bought his damn fruits and put money in his damn pocket and the son of a dog wants to see my license...What kind of country is this? No one trusts anybody." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 111) Separated from his Afghan roots and away from his homeland Baba is almost bereft of his identity and grapples to find an agency in America where he is merely a refugee. It is not that he has migrated from Afghanistan willingly but it is the belligerent Russian forces that led him to abandon his motherland much to his dismay. His angst is visible when he

refuses to see a doctor who is of Russian descent stating vehemently, "I don't care where he was born, he's *Roussi*...His parents were *Roussi*, his grandparents were *Roussi*. I swear on your mother's face I'll break his arm if he tries to touch me." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 135) Baba who represented power and masculinity in Afghanistan is distressed in his new identity as an expatriate. He refuses to accept government support in the form of food stamps. It is beneath him to take favours and he blatantly refuses- "I work always. In Afghanistan I work. In America I work. Thank you very much...but I don't like it free money." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 114)

Thus, though Amir warms up to life as an expatriate, Baba struggles. Hosseini has attempted to showcase the plight of the refugees through Baba's American way of life. Baba's identity is hampered as a refugee and he spends the rest of his life living his life away from his motherland. Refugees like Baba are rendered as subalterns when they are coerced to move away from their homelands. We are therefore made privy to differing categories of subalterns. The former was Ali and Hassan who were subalterns owing to their ethnicity and economic status. Then there is Baba who is a subaltern as he is a refugee- a victim of imperialism. As is mentioned in the paper, 'Subaltern Pedagogy: A Critical Theorizing of Pedagogical Practices for Marginalized Border-Crossers':

A social group who has been rendered dispossessed and marginalized, having often crossed political or natural borders and inhabiting and dwelling, sometimes forcefully, within the social, cultural, and economic margins outside of the hegemonic power structure. The subaltern are refugees, asylum seekers, and migrant workers; they are internally displaced persons or internally colonized; they flee the violent conflict of their homelands or natural disasters or economic despair; and they often experience in their daily lives the threat of violence, poverty, illness, hunger, prejudice, racism, and xenophobia. This subaltern group's shared "culture" is not defined by a common language, nor similar social mores, but rather, a shared space of struggle, of survival, and of interstitiality, or "inbetween-ness" to achieve a shared resistance of hope and prosperity in oppressive and often racist societies. (Keyl 177)

Hosseini mostly draws a rosy picture of life in America and does not depict any interaction with the local population in the US. Yet one can reach to a conjecture that despite being in a prosperous country, Baba struggles because he is no more the powerful businessman as he was in Afghanistan where he wielded respect and where servants were available at his beck and call. On this account, he fringes towards being a subaltern as he is devoid of agency in a foreign land. Immigrants have social groups but for people like Baba who have spent their entire life in their homeland, it becomes difficult to come to terms with life in a new country with different culture and beliefs. To add to it, after 9/11, Afghan immigrants had to face discrimination and xenophobia. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini has touched upon the 9/11 incident in passing. The story almost ends in 2001, so we do not particularly see the aftermath of 9/11 on Baba and Amir. Moreover, people have different lived experiences even in the same country. In another prominent book called *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* where an Afghan immigrant is depicted residing in post 9/11, we witness a different perspective. It is evident in the following lines when Afghans were looked at with disbelief. It was a nasty aftermath of the 9/11 attack and the brunt of it was shared by Afghans in the US. This sidelined them, isolated them making them subalterns:

When we arrived, I was separated from my team at immigration. They joined the queue for American citizens; I joined the one for foreigners. The officer who inspected my passport was a solidly built woman with a pistol at her hip and a mastery of English inferior to mine; I attempted to disarm her with a smile. 'What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?' she asked me. 'I live here,' I replied. 'That is not what I asked you, sir,' she said. 'What is the purpose of your trip to the United States?' (Hamid 86)

This discrimination is seen in many of the post-9/11 Afghan texts and makes one ponder over the consequences of an attack on the people of same ethnicity. There are multiple forces that are at play when living as a refugee and everyone responds to the socio-cultural differences in their own way. Grant Andrews in his thesis points out Baba's struggles and hints at his subaltern status:

Although Amir views America as a place of redemption, there are hints of a barrier to full inclusion into American society. These barriers are mostly

shown in how Amir's father, simply referred to as Baba in the novel, is actively resistant to accepting his position as a disempowered immigrant...Baba's refusal to accept financial assistance is one of the ways in which he resists an identity of dependence and powerlessness. Indeed, Baba becomes the embodiment of power through his association with what the novel constructs as masculine symbols of power while living in Afghanistan, symbols which are idealised in Amir's experience of America. However, despite his ability to enact these masculine ideals, Baba is not able to maintain his power in America. I argue that even though Baba maintains the national myth of the American dream and embodies the images of masculine power, his loss of power in the US is due to the ethnocultural boundary which encircles American identity as it is constructed in the novel. Baba does not identify as an American but maintains his identity as Afghan. (Andrews 17)

Hassan's son Sohrab is another pivotal character who is markedly subaltern. He is a Hazara who suffers physical and mental abuse in a country that become a place wreaked with violence and bloodshed. Being from a lowly community of Hazara which has always been shoved to the fringes, he is further more susceptible to all sorts of atrocities by the belligerent forces in Afghanistan. Sohrab's parents Hassan and Farzana are killed by the Talibanis leaving him an orphan. He is thereafter led to an orphanage from where he is taken away by a Talib officer who abuses him. It is later revealed that the Talib officer is none other than Assef, Hassan, and Amir's nemesis from the past. Sohrab is shown in a wretched state as he is not only a victim of militancy and ethnic bias, but also a victim of sexual harassment. He dances to the tunes of the menacing Assef and suffers in silence as he is voiceless in a country where a poor Hazara has no place but to be shoved into a corner. It is only when Amir rescues him and brings him back to America that he is finally free from his subaltern status. Though the wounds of violence would have never healed fully, he finds a home and a right to be free.

3.3 Subaltern Ethos in A Thousand Splendid Suns

Khaled Hosseini's second novel which was published in the year 2007 tells the story of a war-ravaged Afghanistan through the eyes of two women Mariam and Laila. The trials and tribulations faced by both these women characters unveil the plight of

women in Afghanistan. In this novel Hosseini traces the suffering and discrimination women face and how patriarchy and war alienate them, eventually breaking them. Set against the backdrop of the Soviet revolution of 1978 and then the autocratic Taliban reign, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has brought forth the helplessness of women who are rendered subaltern by war, patriarchy, and subjugation. It is interesting to gauge that in this novel the two protagonists that Hosseini presents are disparate by nature, having brought up in contrasting environment. Yet owing to the common denominators of patriarchy, domestic violence, and oppression they come together to form a sisterhood of sorts. For years Afghanistan was controlled by various warring forces disrupting the peace and imposing unfair laws on its people. The brunt of the constant encroachment was borne by the women of Afghanistan. Through this novel, Hosseini intends to bring to the world the story of two such women who are victims of colonialism and patriarchy. Though fiction, the realistic depiction of the plight of these women touches a chord and makes one take a hard look at the aftermaths of war on women.

Mariam lives in a *kolba* on the outskirts of the city with her mother. From the very beginning of her existence, Mariam is made brutally aware that she is a 'harami' (bastard). Her mother Nana does not mince any words and out of her bitterness and insecurity vents her anger on her daughter. Thus, even before an external force comes into play Mariam is made subaltern by her illegitimate status. Her living on the outskirts, away from the society, is symbolic of her subaltern status. She is robbed of her rights to mingle in the society and is shoved to the fringes. She craves for her father's attention who is conditioned to walk the path laid down by a patriarchal society. Honor plays a vital role here and women are made to believe by the age-old archaic dogmas that they are the inferior sex.

Gerda Lerner, the prominent historian, and a feminist writer investigates the how patriarchy was created. She argues as to how even inferior groups like peasants, proletarians and even slaves have at some point risen and found a place in history. Yet women have mostly been excluded. She questions, "the long delay (over 3500 years) in women's coming to consciousness of their own subordinate position in society. What could explain it? What could explain women's historical "complicity" in upholding the patriarchal system that subordinated them and in transmitting that

system that subordinated them and in transmitting that system, generation after generation, to their children of both sexes?" She states that patriarchy as a system is historical in nature. It has been there since the beginning and is not the outcome of any 'biological determinism.' (Lerner 5–6) Afghan society was steeped in patriarchy and the onus of it is borne by women who are forced to live under the shadows of menfolk.

Nana is a victim of patriarchy and as a result, she is left to be a single mother. She consequently becomes a cynic who despises men. Her bitterness is evident when she tells her daughter, "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) Endurance is another aspect of being a subaltern which is deftly exemplified in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Nana bears the injustice meted out to her and lives away from the city in a secluded hut. Another thing that is to be observed is that she is conditioned to think that it is women's lot to suffer. And though Nana blatantly criticizes Jalil so much so that she even vents out her anger on his sons, she is never directly shown to spew venom on Jalil. She probably realizes that she has no means to fend for herself and Mariam and so she lives a life drawn out by Jalil in a tiny *kolba* away from Jalil's family. Jalil harbors some guilt for impregnating Nana and for abandoning his daughter Mariam yet Jalil himself is born and brought up in a society where he has been conditioned to blindly follow the diktats of patriarchy. Thus, Nana is a subaltern on account of her inferior status and then further when she is marginalized and ousted from society to raise her daughter alone.

Mariam's life topples when Nana commits suicide and she is forced to marry a man old enough to be her father. She has no say in the decision and no one to fall back on. She accepts her destiny as, "She, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have a legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 6)

Feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir spells out in her book, *The Second Sex* as to how marriage as an institution affects women in more ways than one and often cripples them thereby rendering them a subaltern of sorts:

In marrying, the woman receives a piece of the world as property; legal guaranties protect her from man's caprices; but she becomes his vassal. He is economically the head of the community, and he thus embodies it in society's eyes. She takes his name; she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family, she becomes his other "half." She follows him where his work calls him: where he works essentially determines where they live; she breaks with her past brutally, she is annexed to her husband's universe." (Beauvoir 506)

Mariam's trauma and institutionalized abuse begin when she marries Rashid. From a child, she is suddenly transformed into a married yet marginalized subaltern who is wed against her will to a man who perceives her as a commodity. Hosseini explicitly depicts how women are treated in a patriarchal Afghan society. He does not shy away from writing about the atrocities faced by women in a society plagued by both patriarchy and then war. Women are made subalterns not just by patriarchy but they also suffer at the hands of despotic leadership and perpetual scuffles. United Nations Development Funds for Women (UNIFEM) puts across in their paper:

Women are victims of unbelievably horrific atrocities and injustices in conflict situations; this is indisputable. As refugees, internally displaced persons, combatants, heads of household, and community leaders, as activists and peace-builders, women, and men experience conflict differently. Women rarely have the same resources, political rights, authority, or control over their environment and needs that men do. In addition, their caretaking responsibilities limit their mobility and ability to protect themselves. (Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf)

Rasheed imposes his right on Mariam in the very beginning of their relationship when he exclaims, "Where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only. I want you to remember that." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 69) Mariam who had never worn a burqa in her life is made to wear one as Rasheed believes that his 'nang and namoos' lies in the face of his wife. Herein we can gauge how subaltern identity is shaped. It is a gradual process wherein the victim is gaslighted and subjugated. Mariam has no agency in Rasheed's house and is merely treated as

someone who would look after the house, cook, clean, and then warm his bed. Procreation is another duty that is thrust upon women and Mariam too suffers anguish and despair when she is unable to give an offspring, preferably a male offspring to her husband. She suffers multiple miscarriages and with each miscarriage, Rasheed's indifference towards her aggravates. Marital rape and an absence of consent are two other elements that further propel a woman towards misery and make her a subaltern. Rasheed forces himself on Mariam without her consent when she is merely a child. She is though naïve to understand what befell her. Male dominance is established through these acts and is instrumental in defining women as the inferior sex. Derision is another way which is employed to look down upon women and make them a subaltern. Here too Mariam is ridiculed by Rasheed for her ignorance and lack of education- "You don't know what a communist is? Such a simple thing. Everyone knows. Its common knowledge You don't ...Bah. I don't know why I am surprised...You don't know anything, do you? You're like a child. Your brain is empty. There is no information in it." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 97)

On one hand, Rasheed mocks her for her naivety, and on the other hand he warns her from mingling with neighbours who are spoiling their honour as their wives walk alone in the street and do cover herself properly- "There is a teacher living down the street, Hakim is his name, and I see his wife Fariba all the time walking the streets alone with nothing on her head but a scarf. It embarrasses me, frankly to see a man who's lost control of his wife." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 69)

The question which is most pondered upon is whether subalterns can speak. And the further we delve into such characters the more we realize that there is no definite answer to this. Mariam is depicted as a meek woman who suffers in silence and stays put in her terrible marriage bearing domestic violence and indifference. Mariam does voice out her opinion when Rasheed is about to marry a young Laila. But Rasheed does not pay heed to her opinion. Laila, the second protagonist is brought up in an enlightened household and is educated enough to stand for her rights. Yet we see that even Laila has to bear Rasheed's persistent mistreatment. But she does resist. She even intends to leave but her impending pregnancy keeps her decision to leave at bay. For the sake of the unborn child, she consents to marry Rasheed. Herein we can gauge that by dint of being raised by a learned and feminist father, Laila dares to speak up

against any kind of injustice. Education plays a vital role in dispelling subalternity as it makes one aware of his/her rights. Babi, Laila's father is a university-educated man. He had "made it clear to a young Laila from a young age that the most important thing in his life, after her safety, was her schooling...For the last two years Laila had received the *awal numra* certificate, given yearly to the top ranked student in each grade (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 114). Later, Hosseini depicts how two women raised in divergent environments form a sisterhood to fight oppression and ill-treatment. Laila not only voices her opinion time and again she even protects Mariam and gives her the agency to become fearless. As is pointed out in the paper, 'Can Subaltern Be Heard: An Analysis of *The Kite Runner* and *The Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini' in explicit terms:

The subaltern consciousness is constructed through the cultural forces. In the outset of the novels, the subaltern-conscious is fixed in the blood of the subaltern. In the course of the time, the conscious is pricked and punctured and a new conscious develops which motivates the subaltern to act against the hegemonic forces. Gramsci's desire is fulfilled when the subaltern people realize the oppression against them, they join hands, develop understanding, form a state where there was eye for eye, blow for the blow and life for life. (Gafoor and Farooq)

Though both Mariam and Laila are subalterns caged inside the four walls of their misogynist husband, it is the bond that they share against a common enemy that keeps them going. Mariam for the first time in her life finds someone standing up for her. She in turn showers love and affection on Laila's children and treat them as her own. The two women share a mother-daughter relationship which aids them in forging ahead in life. They are first rendered subalterns by Rasheed and later by the outside forces in the form of the Taliban government. While Rasheed is a perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse and treats them as his property, the Taliban forces go a step ahead and impose despotic laws on women and make their lives a living hell. Women during the Taliban reign are completely robbed of their rights and are forced to live under the shadows of their male guardians. After the Taliban takes over, it becomes furthermore difficult for the two women to live a life of dignity. Laila thus endeavours to break free of her subaltern identity by escaping from the clutches of

Rasheed. But her plans turn awry and both she and Mariam are thrown back to the same hell-hole. As mentioned earlier, Hosseini gives an explicit description of the violence and brutality that women during those times faced. He wanted to depict the true picture of Afghan patriarchy so that the world could stand in solidarity with the downtrodden Afghan women. These women have been bereft of their basic rights and are the ones who are the most affected by war and extremism. When these women attempt to flee and look for a better life, they are trampled. Laila and Mariam too face the same horrendous fate when they fail to run away from Kabul:

Laila didn't see the punch coming...It was as if a car had hit her at full-speed, in the tender place between the lower tip of the breastbone and the belly button...There was no cursing, no screaming, no pleading, no surprized yelps, only the systematic business of beating and being beaten, the thump, thump of something solid repeatedly striking flesh, something, someone, hitting a wall with a thud, cloth ripping. Now and then, Laila heard running footsteps, a wordless chase, furniture turning over, glass shattering, then the thumping once more. Laila took Aziza in her arms. A warmth spread down the front of her dress when Aziza's bladder let go. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 261-262)

Taliban rule made things worse for Afghans and predominantly Afghan women. While it was a despotic reign that made the lives of both men and women miserable, the laws were staunch and unfair for the womenfolk. Hosseini draws a vivid depiction of the plight of women under the Taliban reign. Laila and Mariam were already living a life of oppression owing to Rasheed's vicious treatment. And with the new rules imposed by the Taliban things turned grimmer. Forbidding women of their basic rights is how one indulges in the institutionalized suppression of women thereby making them subalterns. And the Taliban's reign did the same in Afghanistan. The Taliban imposed archaic rules and regulations on the Afghans, most of which adversely affected the women. Some of the rules which women were expected to follow are enumerated in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*:

It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a mahram, a male relative. If you are caught alone, you will be beaten and sent home.

You will not under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten.

Cosmetics are forbidden.

Jewellery is forbidden.

You will not wear charming clothes.

You will not speak unless spoken to.

You will not make eye contact with men.

You will not laugh in public. If you do, you will be beaten.

You will not paint your nails. If you do, you will lose a finger.

Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately.

Women are forbidden from working.

If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death. (Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns 271)

Through a fictional tale, Hosseini has laid bare amidst the world as to how women were bereft of their fundamental rights. From the above excerpt, one can begin to understand how women were treated with utter disrespect and how they were objectified. If women failed to abide by these draconian rules they were subjected to assault, rape, and even put to death. And not just women, men were made subalterns too. Even the vile misogynist Rasheed was a subaltern under the Taliban regime. Men too were made to follow a certain decorum and were expected to follow a certain code of conduct. As mentioned in previous chapters the banning of kite-flying was what triggered Hosseini to take his pen and write about the sad state of affairs of his erstwhile peaceful homeland.

Under such extremist reign, women not only suffer mental agony but are also denied medical care. Medical facility is a primary right in any State and yet when Laila is

about to give birth to Rasheed's son, she is denied the same. When she is in labour, Mariam rushes her to a hospital only to be given a blatant reply, "This hospital no longer treats women" (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 278). A 2001 Canadian report states how during the Taliban rule women were robbed of their medical rights. Hosseini therefore states facts and has drawn a realistic picture of the gruesome happenings that occurred post the Taliban takeover:

The idea that health care might be refused based on a person's sex seems preposterous in Canada. Yet that is what many women in Afghanistan face today. The restrictions on women's mobility ordered by the Taliban regime, the edicts against women's rights and freedoms, the denial of education and employment, and even the dress code that is brutally enforced by the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice have had a disastrous effect on the health of the country's women and children. Taliban rule has also created a dire shortage of female physicians, making women's access to health care even more difficult... "If there are no female physicians, women and children are denied help, even if they are dying" ... Reports vary widely across the country, but one theme persists: men should not be looking at women. Even in places where this is tolerated, doctors are barred from examining body parts not directly affected by the ailment. (Mendes)

The above report is a real-time story of the atrocities faced by women and how the healthcare system crumbled under the Taliban's rule. In this book, we witness how Laila delivers a child without anesthetic. Hosseini leaves no stone unturned in portraying how women were mistreated and how gender subalternity made their lives living hells. The female doctors who were educated and had a certain agency were made subalterns too. The female doctor who treats Laila sounds helpless and exclaims, "I have no X-ray either, no suction, no oxygen, not even simple antibiotics. When NGOs offer money, the Taliban turn them away. Or they funnel the money to the places that cater to men." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 283-284).

It is appalling to see how in the current age and era, women are still treated with such contempt. The Taliban takeover occurred in the 90s era. It was a time when women from all around the world were breaking glass ceilings and achieving path-breaking

milestones. But Hosseini introduces us to the plight of Afghan women who are forced to lead a life of fear and subjugation. These are not merely his figment of imagination but characters taken from real life. Like Mariam and Laila, there were women in flesh and blood who went through a vicious circle of suffering and stigma.

Gender subalternity makes women weak and more often than not they endure having no agency and nothing to fall back on. Yet at times, the agony is so profound that they retaliate. They show their angst and displeasure at being pushed around. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, both Mariam and Laila are subdued and made subalterns by patriarchy and militancy. They are left with no choice but to suffer in silence. But Hosseini depicts that women are no weaklings and when they are pushed to their edges they do react with vengeance. Laila does the same when Rasheed suggests that her daughter Aziza should be sent to beg on the streets. She hits him hard and though Rasheed hits her back, at that juncture, she feels liberated. To her "it seemed worthwhile, if absurdly so, to have endured all they'd endured for this one crowning moment, for this act of defiance that would end the suffering of all indignities." Even a tiny act of defiance elevates a subaltern and fills them with hope.

Hosseini also describes how the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha statues. These statues were an intrinsic part of the Afghan fabric, its heritage. By demolishing these statues, the Taliban tried to obliterate Afghan history. Wiping the history and culture of a country is another way the imperialist establishes his stranglehold over the subjugated population. It is a means to wield power and proclaim their hegemony over the subaltern crowd. Laila remembers visiting the Bamiyan Buddhas when she was a young girl with her father. Babi, Laila's father took his daughter to witness the statues as he wanted her to know of her country's rich past- "I also wanted you to see your country's heritage, children, to learn of its rich past. You see, some things I can teach you. Some you learn from books. But there are things that, well, you just have to *see and feel*." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 147).

We observe that along with Mariam and Laila, the little girl Aziza too falls prey to patriarchy and discrimination. From early on she is subjected to gender subalternity. Her father Rasheed berates her and even thrashes her without batting an eyelid. She grows up without the love and affection of a father figure and only finds solace in the

arms of Mariam and Laila. When things turn awry and the family is financially strained, Rasheed decides to send Aziza off to a dilapidated orphanage. Aziza who is just a little girl bears the brunt of the poverty-stricken family. Rasheed showers all his love and affection to his son Zalmai. He openly discriminates between his children and does not attempt to care for his daughter. Hosseini gives vivid descriptions of Afghanistan which appears gaunt and broken by years of violence and bloodshed. Women and children were most affected by the despotic reign and Hosseini does not mince words to highlight the dire state of the women and children. Poverty was widespread and since women were forbidden to go out and work, they were helpless and could do nothing but watch their children starve. Like Laila many mothers were forced to send away their children to orphanages so that they could eat three meals. These orphanages were run by a few good Samaritans but were always under-resourced due to lack of funds. Aziza too is sent to such an orphanage and at a young age she is separated from her mother. The director of the orphanage makes efforts to educate the girls albeit in a clandestine manner as girls cannot study as per the Taliban law:

Kaka Zaman made it a point to teach them something every day, reading and writing most days, sometimes geography, a bit of history or science, something about plant and animals. But we have to pull the curtains, Aziza said, so the Taliban don't see us. Kaka Zaman had knitting needles and balls of yarn ready, she said, in case of Taliban inspection. We put the books away and pretend to knit. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 314).

Laila had to make arduous efforts to see her daughter at the orphanage. As per the law, women could not walk the streets without a male escort. Since Rasheed refuses to accompany her, Laila draws the courage to walk to the orphanage on her own. Though a subaltern, Laila stands up to her husband who forbids her from going alone lest she would suffer the Taliban's wrath. And she does get beaten up by the Taliban many times. Yet she persevered as she could not give up on seeing her daughter. Here we see how women had become resilient and despite the fear of the extremists, they did not give up for the sake of their loved ones. As subalterns they lacked support due to which they could not defy the forces if they wanted to live. It was not easy to bear horrific acts of violence that were meted out to them, yet they moved on with their

lives- 'One day a young Talib beat Talib with a radio antenna. When he was done, he gave a final whack to the back of her neck and said, "I see you again I'll beat you until your mother's milk leak out of your bones." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 313).

Aziza, the little girl appears to be strong on the outside. But she was being separated from her family. She developed a stutter which is often a sign of trauma. Gender subalternity ran deep in Afghanistan and it reached its zenith during the Taliban rule. And not just grown women but little girls were victims of it too. They were deprived of a normal and safe childhood. The constant scuffles and power battles led to the birth of a generation of young adults with a traumatic and scarred childhood.

The question which is most asked when discussing subalterns is whether they can speak. They cannot speak as we have already established. The fact that they are deprived of rights and agency is what makes them subalterns in the first place. Yet, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini shows us how sisterhood aids in breaking the shackles of subalternity. Mariam is depicted as a subdued character, she is portrayed as someone who is cornered right after she is born as an illegitimate child, a *harami*. But when she realizes that Rasheed is going to kill Laila, it becomes the last straw. Laila is like a daughter to a childless Mariam. Laila is like a flicker of hope who fills Mariam's morose existence with joy. Laila and Aziza's companionship warms Mariam's heart. And so, the insurmountable love for Laila drives Mariam to end Rasheed's life. From a feeble woman, who is suppressed and gaslighted by her husband, Mariam transforms into someone who stands against violence. Mariam makes the ultimate sacrifice to save Laila's life and herein we witness how when the going gets tough, even a victimised subaltern woman stands up against injustice. Mariam could not let Rasheed kill Laila and so for the first time in her life she resolves to take things in her hands- "She turned it so the sharp edge was vertical, and, as she did, it occurred to her that that was the first time that *she* was deciding the course of her own life." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 341).

Mariam is executed as per the Taliban law but she dies knowing that she stood up against a lifetime of violence and subjugation. She dies knowing that through her final act, she could give Laila the freedom to live happily. Laila who was a victim of

oppression and misogyny all her life is no more a subaltern when she lives a life of dignity with Tariq. She not only ceases to be a subaltern; she comes back to Afghanistan to help reinstate her battered homeland. Thus, in *A thousand Splendid Suns* we are given a deep dive into the life of subaltern characters who suffer years of systemic abuse. Yet, Hosseini drives home a point that there is hope. Sisterhood and the right support system can obliterate subalternity. A war-ravaged nation can be rebuilt with the help of natives like Laila and Tariq who work for the upliftment of their erstwhile rich homeland.

3.4 Subaltern Ethos in And the Mountains Echoed

Ranajit Guha, the driving force behind the development of Subaltern Studies, points out that “subaltern is a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian Society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way.” (Guha and Spivak 35) The concept of subaltern as already noted prevails in Hosseini’s books as he makes an endeavor to become a mouthpiece of the battered citizens of Afghanistan through his characters. In his third book *And the Mountains Echoed* which was published in 2013, yet again we find myriads of characters that represent subalternity not just in Afghanistan but across continents. Through his characters, Hosseini tries to depict the travesties of people who have been on the fringes of society and who have been constantly robbed of an agency.

And the Mountains Echoed commences with the depiction of a family reeling with abject poverty. The head of the family Saboor narrates a story to his two children- a story which is steeped in symbolism as it mirrors his own plight as a father. Like Baba Ayub in his story, he also is at a crossroads. Poverty and deprivation led him to give away his daughter so that she has a better life- ‘A finger cut to save the hand’ (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 4) Like Baba Ayub he also takes solace in the fact that his daughter may be away but she would lead a life of comfort as opposed to the grim life he has to offer. Saboor is a subaltern who is bereft of economic freedom in a country that is affected deeply by the perpetual conquests. The class divide in erstwhile Afghanistan is extreme and it is this divide that segregates the society into two classes, namely the elite class and the labor class which is predominantly affected by subalternity. The act of giving away his daughter also highlights how child trafficking was rampant in the war-ravaged and volatile land of Afghanistan. Children

were dying of hunger and deprivation owing to which parents had to resort to such dire means for the well-being of their children. A survey conducted to ascertain the reality of those times stated that amongst Afghan refugee women and children in Quetta over 80% of children were unregistered and child mortality was 31% (112/366 births). Of those who survived, 67% were severely malnourished, with malnutrition increasing with age. These vulnerable populations remained entirely dependent on assistance from UN agencies and non-governmental organizations. (Bhutta)

Under such circumstances, Pari is given away to the rich Wahdati. One can realize that it was an outcome of the penury and deprivation the family faced. Subaltern identity is a prime cause of Saboor's act and it is established in the first few chapters itself. Also, it is this act, which leads to the separation of the siblings Abdullah and Pari which in turn sets into motion a lifetime of longing and pain. Owing to the subaltern nature of his family, young Abdullah is not only separated from his sister but he spends the rest of his life pining for her. On the other hand, Pari who is too young to realize what befalls her, is made to spend a life which is luxurious yet a life which is bereft of love.

Pari is affected deeply by the subaltern state of her family so much so that her very identity is transformed. She is never devoid of money but she spends her whole life with a self-absorbed mother Nila Wahdati who is ever so critical of her. The class divide and poverty brought on by incessant conquests destroyed many such families in erstwhile Afghanistan.

Nila Wahdati is another character who on the face of it appears to be liberated and enlightened. Yet despite being a feisty woman who writes bold and amorous poetry and someone who owns her sexuality, she faces gender subalternity. In a country like Afghanistan where women had no agency, Nila Wahdati stands as a threat and her rebellious streak is not accepted by the Afghan society. Suleiman Wahdati's family too does not approve of her because of her bold and feminist pursuits and ideas. As one of the servants mentions, "It was well-known in Kabul that she had no nang and namoos, no honor, and that though she was only twenty she had already been ridden all over town like Mr. Wahdati's car...not only she made no attempt to deny these

allegations, she wrote poems about them...one of the men remarked that in his village they would have slit her throat by now. (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 81).

Nila Wahdati is a victim of patriarchy and it is only because of her financial standing that she is able to escape the wrath of the rigid Afghan policing. But we see that eventually she moves to another country and prospers as a poet in a foreign land. Afghan society was not open enough to appreciate a woman who penned verses about women's sexuality. Even her husband who is supposedly a learned man and an artist himself feels ashamed of her illicit poems. Nabi, the driver who is smitten with Nila describes her art vividly:

But Nila's poems defied tradition. They followed no preset meter of rhyming pattern. Nor did they deal with the usual things, trees and spring flowers and bulbul birds. Nila wrote about love, and by love I do not mean the Sufi yearnings of Rumi or Hafez but instead physical love. She wrote about lovers whispering across pillows, touching each other. She wrote about pleasure. I had never heard language such as this spoken by a woman. (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 98)

Nila is portrayed as an emancipated woman who is in sync with her sexuality. She is someone who smokes and drinks like the other Afghan men and has no qualms about it. Such a woman was scandalous in the eyes of the patriarchal and misogynist Afghan society. Thus, it is natural that Nila faced gender subalternity. But Hosseini presents Nila Wahdati as a complex character who is not perturbed by what society makes of her. Yet she is a narcissist and for filling in the void of infertility she takes in Pari as her daughter. But she is perpetually critical of Pari and disapproves of her career as a mathematician. Nila's character is flawed and owing to her insecurities she eventually dies by suicide. But it does not take away the fact that she was shunned in her homeland and had a scarred childhood. When her parents divorced, she was left under the custody of her strict Afghan father. Nila's poetry is described as path-breaking by an interviewer from a literary magazine and he goes on to comment that had Nila been born in a richer and more liberal country she would have been celebrated. But Afghanistan was a country where women were subalterns pushed to the fringes and even a woman as strong as Nila could only escape it when she migrated to France.

Her candid conversation with a literary magazine depicts the same- “Noone in Kabul considered me a pioneer of anything but bad taste, debauchery, and immoral character. Not least of all my father. He said my writings were the ramblings of a *whore*. He used that word precisely. He said I’d damaged his family name beyond repair.” (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 211)

Suleiman Wahdati is another character whom one would empathize with immensely. Hosseini has deftly portrayed the helplessness of a homosexual man in a country where LGBTQ+ rights did not exist at all. There was no acknowledgment and acceptance of such rights as Afghanistan was a strictly patriarchal country. Owing to this, Suleiman Wahdati is never able to come out of the closet and has a veiled existence. He loves his driver Nabi and till the end of his life, he is in agony owing to his unrequited love for Nabi. Under societal pressure, he marries Nila but the marriage dies a quick death as Suleiman’s sexuality does not allow the marriage to flourish. Suleiman’s only outlet for his sexuality is his paintings wherein he outpours his love for Nabi. His wife Nila can see through him and she feels sorry for him that he was born in a country where he could not find acceptance and the freedom to live as he wished- “I felt sorry for him, mostly. He could not have chosen a worse time or worse place to be born the way he was.” (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 215)

Suleiman Wahdati is an affluent and educated man who hails from the so-called elite Pashtun class. Yet he is devoid of the freedom to own his sexuality. Even though he is a privileged man, he too succumbs to the patriarchal society and the taboos of the Afghan milieu. He is thus a subaltern who must hide his identity and abide by the hegemonic rules of the Afghan higher-ups. Subalternity does not always stem out of class divide but even the elite fall prey to discrimination and their voices are constantly suppressed. As the data suggests:

For Afghanistan’s LGBT people, institutionalized discrimination is nothing new; homosexual relations were criminalized by the Taliban the first time they took over and again by the Afghan republic that was formed after the 2001 U.S. invasion. The 2017 penal code mandated jail terms for sodomy and lesbian intimacy. Vague legal language forced LGBT people to live underground. (O’Donnell)

In *And the Mountains Echoed* Hosseini has catapulted a series of events and has presented interconnected individual stories that span across continents. We are told about the story of twin sisters Parwana and Masooma. Parwana in a bout of jealousy leaves her sister Masooma an invalid for life. But her guilt makes her care for her till Masooma herself leads her to abandon her in the desert. Here it is not known whether Masooma is aware of her sister's betrayal. She is pushed to the fringes and is made to live the life of an invalid who is dependent on others. She is a silent subaltern. Though we do see her perspective from a third person omniscient narrator and can only so much as make a conjecture about her silence.

Hosseini also depicts the lives of Afghan exiles and we witness how they are treated as superiors by the local Afghan crowd. They are Westernized and can at once be spotted by the Indigenous crowd as immigrants. Idris and Timur who were once cornered due to the aggression in their homeland are now rich immigrants. Idris comes across a young girl Roshi who has been inflicted with a horrific head wound. She is being looked after by a Bosnian rescue nurse Amra. Idris initially volunteers to pay for Roshi's surgery but once he is back in the comfort of his sprawling home in America, he no longer has the urge to do so. Here Hosseini makes an endeavour to show how Afghan immigrants feel disillusioned by the war-ravaged terrains of their homeland. Many of them come back only to claim their lost land. Some develop an urge to 'give back' but it often gets fizzled out when they go back to their comfort zone- to the country which is their new home. Here it is to be noted that someone who was a subaltern once can take the role of the elite and vice-versa. Idris and Timur were once subalterns ousted by the belligerent forces in Afghanistan. But later they got back their sense of agency and freedom as exiles in a foreign country. They come back to their homeland as Westernized elites. Idris is an elite who breaks his resolution of helping Roshi as soon as he is surrounded by his mundane yet luxurious life in America. He defines the feeling as:

In the last month, Roshi has become something abstract to him, like a character in a play. Their connection has frayed. The unexpected intimacy he had stumbled upon in the hospital, so urgent and acute, has eroded into something dull. The experience has lost its power. He recognizes the fierce determination that has seized him for what it really was, an illusion, a mirage.
(Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 170)

Roshi overcomes her trauma with the love and care of nurse Amra and the financial support of Timur. She writes a book about her journey and is supposedly a successful author now. She has the dignity to not name and shame Idris. Here Hosseini gives us a resounding example to show that if a subaltern is offered love and unstinted support, he/she can speak and would no longer be a subaltern. Roshi who was a prey to a horrific crime, comes out of the shackles of oppression and shares her voice with the world through her book. Thus, with the right kind of support, she does speak up breaking away from gender subalternity.

Hosseini has captured the contemporary political undercurrents of Afghanistan to show how volatile those times were. Taliban soldiers had started taking over the Afghan land while also indulging in the illegal opium poppy trade. One such warlord's son is Adel. Adel is a young boy who reveres his father. His father is a powerful man, a former Jihadi with a towering personality. Adel stays within the large walls of a huge mansion away from the city and misses companionship. One fine day, he meets Gholam a poor boy of his age and he at once becomes friends with him. Hosseini here draws a contrast of sorts to delineate two boys, both Afghans but one is a subaltern and the other hails from the elite class. This juxtaposition is intriguing as it gives one a peek into the social fabric of Afghanistan in the 90s era. Adel's father who is addressed as 'Commander Sahib' had usurped the land in Shadbagh that belonged to Gholm's grandfather Saboor. When Adel and his family had to flee Afghanistan due to the constant scuffles, their land was being taken over by the *Talibani* warlord.

By drawing out the characters of Adel and Gholam, Hosseini aims to show how disparate lives can be for two young boys who are citizens of the same country. While Adele leads a life of comfort and luxury owing to his elite status, Gholam has to live in a refugee camp. Gholam was sent away from the Pakistani refugee camp and when he landed in Afghanistan, he is surprised to see that Afghanistan no longer resembles the image his grandfather painted. The two boys though inhabitants of the same country are poles apart. Hosseini portrays the two boys to give us a peek into the dynamics of subaltern and elite class. It is intriguing as to how class and power dynamics come into play and make one subaltern. Adele is fascinated with the kind of life Gholam leads which is very different from his sequestered and protected

existence- "The glimpses Gholam had allowed Adel into his life suggested an existence rife with trouble, unpredictability, hardship, but also adventure, a life far removed from Adel's own, though it unfolded practically within spitting distance of him." (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 265)

While we see the conspicuous gap between the elite and the subaltern through Adel and Gholam, we are also made privy to how a subaltern is not always silent. A subaltern may be powerless but he/she also revolts and tries to ask for what is rightfully his/hers. Here too Gholam's father Iqbal does not walk away after learning that his land has been snatched from him. He stands up and is valiant enough to lock horns with a man as powerful as Adel's baba. The act of valour probably cost him his life but he did not bog down. Adel is disillusioned after coming to terms with the true picture of his father. Hosseini underlines how the elite keeps their conscience clean by acting as the saviours of the poor subalterns. Adel's Baba also does charitable acts like opening a school and hospital. He tells his son that the poor are hard to please- "Baba jan had told him once no matter how much you did, sometimes the poor spoke ill of the rich." (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 268)

In the paper, 'Subalternity in Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*' it is argued upon that the seemingly benevolent acts by the elites are further hindering the subalterns. It reflects Spivak's objection of how it is merely the projection of elite saving subalterns. As the researchers put forth in explicit terms:

The statement of the elite saving the subaltern from their deprived condition is laid all over the text by Hosseini in his text. Pari seemed saved by the elite from the uncertain future that her real father could provide. Mrs. Nila felt safe from the Islamic confinement by Western culture and attitude. Roshni the young girl in the hospital is saved by Timur who finances her operation and later helps her with education and book publication...It seems at first justifiable for the elite and the West to rescue them from their suffering, but in doing so these female characters are either silenced or are made to speak the language of the saviour. (Verma and Tshering)

However, it is observed that though Hosseini portrayed subaltern characters whose redemption was many a times facilitated by the elites, the subalterns retained their roots and voice. Nila could survive the atrocities that followed in Afghanistan and

continue to pen poetry in France. Pari becomes a mathematician who lives a full life whereas in Afghanistan women are prohibited from studying. Roshi becomes an author and is able to bring her story of resilience into the world. Interconnected stories are thus deftly woven to delineate the subaltern identity of Afghans spread out across continents.

3.5 Conclusion

Based on textual reading and analysis of the three novels namely, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, it is observed that subaltern ethos prevails in Khaled Hosseini's works. In all his novels he has drawn multiple characters which are subaltern in nature. He has initiated a dialogue about the class dynamics between the Pashtun and Hazara clans in *The Kite Runner* and brought to the fore the stigma faced by the Hazara tribe. The lives of Afghan exiles are also portrayed by Hosseini in both *The Kite Runner* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. Through *A Thousand Splendid Suns* he has delved into gender subalternity by showing the relationship between two oppressed women. The plight of subalterns who are traumatized by the Taliban despotism is brought alive through multiple characters in *And the Mountains Echoed*. Poverty-stricken subalterns with no agency are highlighted too in these novels. As for the question whether subalterns are able to speak or not, we can say that if subalterns have an agency, they would not be in the category of subalterns anymore. Yet the fictional characters sketched by Khaled Hosseini are reflections of the erstwhile Afghan society. And sometimes they have no choice but to suffer the atrocities of the hegemonic power while at other times they attempt to break free through whatever means is available to them. The significant aspect to be noted is that through these stories, Hosseini brought the stories of subalterns on the world stage. By doing so, he facilitated debunking the Afghan myth. Moreover, the global readership received by all his books started a conversation around the rights of the oppressed subalterns. And this is indeed a step in the right direction.

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CHAPTER – IV

SUBALTERNITY: AN ENDURING
FORCE IN THE QUEST FOR
ATONEMENT IN KHALED
HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER,
A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS,
AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED



Subalternity: An Enduring Force in the Quest for Atonement in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*

4.1 Post-Colonial Intervention and Subalternity

It has already been established in the previous chapter that subaltern undercurrents prevail in the works of Khaled Hosseini. In this chapter, it will be further explored that owing to their subaltern nature, the varied characters of Hosseini struggle to attain redemption. One atones himself/herself when he/she is able to make amends for a transgression. But there are many hindrances in the path to atonement. The subaltern nature cripples an individual as it pushes one to the peripheries. Post-colonial scholars have delved into the concept of subalternity and brought forth how it stumps the growth of a person. The right intervention by post-colonial thinkers brought to light the travesties of the subalterns. It highlighted that being a subaltern was obstructive. It was bound to limit one's progress and stagnate him/her. Subalternity has been often explored in literature to make up for the under-representation of the voiceless individuals. Subalterns have also been a subject of post-colonial literature to bring out their authentic voice amidst the world at large. Most often these subalterns are put in front of the world through the skewed eyes of colonizers and hegemonic powers. Thus, such literature is important as it stops the trivialization of a class which is pushed to the background. As is reiterated in the paper, *Subalternity as Event in History and Literature*- "The postcolonial intervention in culture and ideology is often enacted through reclaiming certain lost, elided over, previously unrepresented subjects of history. The site of this transformative endeavor, which seeks to put new subjects on the discursive map of nations is often the act of revisionist historiography in both history and literature." (Mukherjee)

In all three novels of Khaled Hosseini, we have characters who struggle to atone themselves. They face many hurdles while absolving themselves of their past. But the biggest impediment is their subaltern identity. Hosseini has done liberal and realistic depictions of subaltern characters in his works because he wanted to put forth their fears and struggles. Be it Hassan from *The Kite Runner*, Mariam from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, or Saboor from *And the Mountains Echoed*, each character is stuck in a

quagmire that only deepens owing to their subalternity. Hosseini has therefore shown his solidarity with these realistic subaltern characters by showing their plight through his fictional representation. Through these characters, he had delved into gender subalternity and other elements of subaltern theory. In the paper *Rethinking the subaltern and the question of censorship in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks*, the researcher purports how, "Gramsci never reduces subordination to a single relation, but rather conceives subalternity as an intersectionality of the variations of race, class, gender, culture, religion, nationalism, and colonialism functioning within an ensemble of socio-political and economic relations." (Green 400). One can see this aspect being mirrored in Hosseini's depiction of subalternity in his works. After Gramsci sowed the seeds of the concept of the subaltern, it was the Subaltern Studies Group that further analyzed it and added new facets to it. The group which comprised thinkers like Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak Chakravorty, Partha Chatterjee, Gyanendra Pandey, Dipesh Chakravorty, amongst others, dealt with the concept of subaltern with South Asian history as a backdrop. But with time the notion of subaltern became a bigger phenomenon which came to be correlated in other branches as well. The methodology adopted by the Subaltern Studies Group has been extensively applied to study the politics and culture of nations across the world. It has rightly been pointed out that, "the concept of the subaltern has expanded in interpretation from the original configuration to apply to any population that is disenfranchised and unreachable due to hegemonic oppression. Subaltern turns in other fields, specifically literature, anthropology, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies, have been made by scholars across the globe." (Betik)

Subaltern studies have since then become an integral part of post-colonialism. It would not be erroneous to say that the idea of subalternity has been an intervention of sorts by the post-colonial philosophy. The two more often than not overlap as their end objective is to amplify marginalized voices suppressed by the colonial or hegemonic powers. Subaltern studies were instrumental in initiating dialogue and bringing marginalized sections to the forefront. This thought is echoed in the paper titled, *Dialog Theory in Marginalized Settings: A Subaltern Studies Approach*:

Dialog with the subaltern is constituted as a mediation that brings subaltern narratives into mainstream structures/sites of knowledge. Such dialog is founded on consistent skepticism toward the co-optive politics of dialog that serves neoliberal agendas. Of particular relevance for subaltern studies scholars are the ways in which dialog is constituted in the realm of power, difference, inequality, marginalization, and resistance. (Dutta and Pal 364)

It is intriguing to gauge that we can find a long trail of subaltern characters in Hosseini's books and even in the context of Afghan politics one can find traces of subaltern ethos. Khaled Hosseini's books are familial sagas on the surface but they also capture the political and social upheavals of erstwhile Afghanistan with studied authenticity. Most of the characters yearn to atone themselves and seek true happiness. But there are many roadblocks in their way. The warring Afghan milieu is one of the biggest foes on the road to atonement. But being a subaltern is what becomes obstructive and makes their journey toward happiness an indomitable one.

4.2 Hassan's Subalternity: A Barrier to Amir's Atonement

The most significant relationship that forms the edifice of the novel *The Kite Runner* is the relationship between Amir and Hassan. Amir who is an affluent Pashtun boy forges a bond of love and amity with Hassan, a subservient Hazara boy. Hassan is portrayed by Hosseini as someone who belongs to the marginalized Hazara clan of the erstwhile Afghanistan. The Hazara clan was prey to institutionalized suppression and they were pushed to primarily work under the servitude of the elite upper class. Amir and his Baba are Pashtuns who live in the Wazir Akbar district of Kabul. Ali and his son Hassan are servants in Amir's house and while both Baba and Amir treat them with love, there is a thin line of demarcation that segregates them as inferiors. Amir is conditioned to treat the Hazara servant as someone who could be played with but could not be accorded the title of a friend. Hassan is also aware of his stature and serves Amir with utmost loyalty. He passively accepts his status and follows the diktats laid down by the elite Pashtuns as well as the warring forces of the Soviet Union and later the Talibs. Hazaras went through a process of dehumanization which eventually turned them into subalterns. Dehumanization occurs when an individual or class is robbed of the basic right to live a dignified life and is mistreated. This act of

dehumanization can be exercised in multiple ways, primarily amongst them being, genocide, objectification, and systemic oppression. Amir realizes this act of dehumanization against the Hazaras when he discovers that they are massacred and ousted from their homes. But rarely does any book mention the injustice meted out to Hazaras. Their sufferings were erased and it was on rare occasions when Amir could read how the Pashtuns had “quelled them with unspeakable violence.” (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 9)

Racism was a silent evil that led to the gradual dehumanization of the Hazaras. In the 19th century, racism was rampant in America and if reports are to be believed discrimination against Blacks still happens. As per this fairly recent report, “Black adults report personally experiencing widespread discrimination across social institutions and interpersonally, including in seeking health care, unfair treatment in by the police, and being targets of racial slurs or microaggressions. Blacks report experiencing racial discrimination at significantly higher levels than whites, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or the racial composition of their neighbourhood.” (Bleich et al.) Blacks were discriminated based on their appearance and were largely given menial jobs in the social structure. Similarly, Hazaras too were subjected to work as servants, were exempted from education, and were denied a place in the decision-making bodies. What is sad is that owing to this long chain of dehumanization the Hazara clan were conditioned to accept this status. As is mentioned in the paper which focuses on the dehumanization of Hazaras:

We can simply assume that dehumanization is the denial of humanness. In *The Kite Runner* dehumanization in an intergroup context is highlighted. Pashtuns dehumanize Hazaras because of their poor status and similarity with Mongols in their physical appearance. Dehumanization is a strategy of racial discrimination. It is usually related to ethnicity, race, immigration, and genocide. In this case, intergroup conflict arise as a result of which one group dehumanizes another. In the novel, the Pashtuns dehumanize the Hazaras because they are immigrants who had migrated from Iran. (Mujeebullah Shah et al.)

It is owing to Hassan's subalternity and his passive acceptance of this treatment, that he is subjected to everyday contempt. Amir witnesses Hassan being berated by people around him and even he is conditioned to take the ill-treatment of the Hazaras as something which is a part and parcel of Hazara life. When Assef the neighbourhood bully jeers at him calling him names like 'Flat-Nose' (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 34), Amir hardly stands up for Hassan. He is mostly a mute spectator to the insinuations hurled at Hassan. For Amir, Hassan was always the one standing up for him. When Assef instigates him, asking him with contempt, "How can you talk to him, play with him, let him touch you...How can you call him your friend?" (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 36) even then Amir is unable to speak up for himself. It is Hassan who comes to his friend's rescue:

"But perhaps you didn't notice that I am the one holding the slingshot. If you make a move, they'll have to change your nickname from Assef 'the Ear Eater' to 'One-Eyed Assef,' because I have this rock pointed at your left eye." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 37).

Little does Hassan know that Assef would come back with vengeance and turn his life upside down. Assef who has always subjected both Hassan and his father Ali to derision because of their ethnicity, goes a step ahead when he molests Hassan. Hassan is raped when he is happily kite-running for his friend. While the abuse happens, Amir watches from a distance too shocked and afraid to move. But this incident changes everything between the two boys. Amir is filled with remorse owing to his cowardice and inability to save someone who always saved him. Hassan on the other hand does not open up about his abuse as he is conditioned to bear the atrocities often meted out to his clan. Had there been a dialogue between the two boys, Amir would not have harboured the guilt of betraying his friend and half-brother Hassan. But it is Hassan's subaltern nature that makes him meek. His subalternity stops him from sharing his pain with his Amir. He goes on with life as if nothing ever happened. This further fills Amir with guilt and he suppresses his anguish while internally yearning to atone himself. Hassan's subaltern helplessness is depicted when he serves Assef at a party a few days after the incident of molestation. Amir is infuriated to see Hassan serve food to Assef. But Hassan is not conditioned to stand up against the elite, a trait

which underlines subalternity- "In one of those brief bursts of light, I saw something I'll never forget: Hassan serving drinks to Assef and Wali from a silver platter. The light winked out, a hiss, a crackle, then another flicker of orange light: Assef grinning, kneading Hassan in the chest with a knuckle." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 87).

Amir realizes that his guilt would be aggravated if he has to see Hassan every day. Seeing Hassan doing the usual chores as if nothing had shifted was something Amir could not long endure. He also understands that Hassan would have to see Assef and his friends now and then. He would have to go on seeing the perpetrators of such a heinous crime and go on with his life as if nothing had happened. This thought was unbearable for him. And thus, he comes to a resolve that Hassan must go. He must go not only because the mere sight of Hassan filled him with remorse, but also because Amir could not see Hassan exposed to those who molested him. Amir did not want Hassan to suffer. Rahim Khan let go of his beloved Homaira because she would have had to suffer as she was a mere Hazara- "My family would have never accepted her as an equal. You don't order someone to polish your shoes one day and call them "sister" the next." (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 87) Similarly, Amir also felt that the only solution to lessen both Hassan's suffering and his helplessness was to send Hassan away:

I sat on the edge of the bed, turned the notebook in my hands, thought about what Rahim Khan had said about Homaira, how his father's dismissing her had been for the best in the end. She would have suffered. Like the times Kaka Homayoun's projector got stuck on the same slide, the same image kept flashing in my mind over and over: Hassan, his head downcast, serving drinks to Assef and Wali. Maybe it would be for the best. Lessen his suffering. And mine too. Either way, this much had become clear: One of us had to go. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 89)

Amir's actions after he witnesses the molestation of Hassan are to a great extent determined by the fact that Hassan was a Hazara subaltern. On a subconscious level, Amir had grown up being fed the notion that a Hazara's lot is to be at the lowest rung of the Afghan society. He was made to believe that the Pashtuns had privilege and the Hazaras were supposed to serve them and be at their mercy. It was how things stood

since the time Amir came to his senses and as a young boy, he did not have the sensibility to question the status quo. The paper, *The Kite Runner: A Psychological Analysis of Amir*, employs Ben's Self-Perception Theory ("Self-Perception Theory in Social Psychology - IResearchNet") to throw light on the aspect that Amir judges his perception of Hassan, a Hazara through his actions. The following lines exemplify his conundrum:

I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscience mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he? (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 68)

The above-mentioned research paper thus emphasizes that "In the eyes of Amir one's self should be prioritized over Hassan, who is considered lowly based on the social categorization in which the value of a person is determined by the category that one belongs to...Ben's Self Perception theory then infers that the attitude Amir is showing is still a deception of one's morality as one still tries to justify one's decision and behaviour made in one's moral dilemma." (Aruta et al. 84)

It is evident from the above discussion that Hassan's subalternity acts as a barrier to Amir's atonement. The class dynamics play a vital role in creating a fissure between the two boys. Though inseparable, the two boys could not open up to each other owing to the master-servant equation being laid out to them since the beginning. If not for Hassan's subalternity, Amir could have mustered up the courage to reconcile with him.

Hassan too would have openly talked about the molestation faced by him. However, the subsequent guilt and subtle conditioning led to the separation of the two boys. A strong sense of guilt never lets go of Amir and it is decades before he is able to atone himself when he becomes a saviour for Hassan's son. It is only when he adopts

Sohrab and brings him to America, is he free of the years of bottled-up feelings of guilt and self-hatred. Sohrab who is a victim of sexual assault and molestation, is numb when he reaches America. His subaltern background as well as the wounds of maltreatment in the hands of Pashtun men, make him forlorn. But Amir and his wife Soraya treat him with love and patience and one fine day he lightens up thereby purging Amir of his past sins:

“Do you want me to run that kite for you?”

His Adam’s apple rose and fell as he swallowed. The wind lifted his hair. I thought I saw him nod.

“For you, a thousand times over,” I heard myself say.

Then I turned and ran.

It was only a smile, nothing more. It didn’t make anything all right...But I’ll take it. With open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 323-324)

4.3 Subaltern and Patriarchal Elements: Baba’s Failure to Atone

On the surface, *The Kite Runner* appears to be the story of two friends and half-brothers who are drawn apart when a horrible incident occurs. One of the boys is molested and the other finds guilt rankling at him as he did nothing to stand up for his friend. But it is also important that one delves into the other characters in the book as each character is instrumental in shaping both Amir and Hassan’s life journey. Moreover, *The Kite Runner* has primarily been seen as a bildungsroman which traces Amir’s journey towards redemption. Yet a closer look would reveal that not just Amir, Baba had also committed transgressions which made him guilty. Baba never overtly showed elements of remorse or the fact that he wanted to atone himself. But there were several factors which prevented him to walk on the road to atonement. Patriarchy and subaltern elements were the pivotal aspects which acted as impediments in Baba’s atonement journey.

Baba has been depicted as a steely figure who is revered by all. Even his son is intimidated by his presence. Baba appears to be a humanitarian and is kind enough to

treat his servant Ali and his son Hassan with benevolence. Hassan who had a cleft lip is treated only because Baba arranges for a corrective surgery. Baba never misses Hassan's birthday and tries his best to keep him happy:

Baba never missed Hassan's birthday. For a while, he used to ask Hassan what he wanted, but he gave up doing that because Hassan was always too modest to actually suggest a present. So, every winter Baba picked something out himself. He bought him a Japanese toy truck one year, an electric locomotive and train track set another year. The previous year, Baba had surprised Hassan with a cowboy hat just like the one Clint Eastwood wore in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*... I have summoned Dr. Kumar from New Delhi. Dr. Kumar is a plastic surgeon... It's an unusual present, I know, Baba said. And probably what you had in mind, but this present will last you forever. (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 39-40)

Baba cared for Hassan who was a Hazara servant. His kindness towards Hassan made his son envious. One would think that Baba was doing it as he was above treating people based on their ethnicity and social stature. But later it is revealed that Baba performed such acts of kindness because he too was harbouring a heavy guilt. Hassan was his own flesh and blood. He was his son and so Baba tried his best to give him whatever he could. Opening an orphanage, and caring for the poor on the streets, 'it was all his way of redeeming himself' (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 263). Though Baba made an attempt to overcome his remorse through these acts of benevolence, he could not truly redeem himself as he was stuck in a patriarchal Afghan society. He could have proclaimed that Hassan was his son and both Hassan and Amir could have lived as brothers. But the kind of environment he belonged to and the social conditioning that molded him, prevented him from opening up and accepting his mistakes. After all, he was a rich Pashtun businessman and his illegitimate son was born out of a fling with a mere Hazara woman. Society would have named and shamed him. The fact that Hassan was a subaltern did not make it any easier for Baba to give him his name and a rightful place. There was an unequivocal line between the elite Pashtuns and the marginalized Hazaras. Baba was conditioned to see the subaltern Hazaras as people who were meant to be on the fringes. He could therefore never conceive the idea that

Hassan could be given his rightful place. Guilt overpowered him though and all through his life, he kept compensating for the betrayal towards Hassan by keeping him close and showering him with gifts. To his Pashtun mind, he was doing enough. But it was not atonement in the true sense of the word.

Hassan's subalternity and his own patriarchal upbringing made him live a lie. He could never tell his son Amir as well as his illegitimate son Hassan the truth. The invisible line between Hazaras and Pashtuns had to be maintained. But when Ali and Hassan leave his home, Baba is crestfallen. He could not tell him to stop as he was his son. Baba did not have the courage to own up to the fact that he had impregnated a lowly Hazara woman. He is never able to atone himself completely and when Hassan leaves for good, Baba knows that he is seeing Hassan, his son for the last time. Despite that Baba could not stop Hassan and tell him that he was his son. He had by then surrendered to the bitter lie that Hassan was a mere Hazara. He was born out of the womb of a Hazara woman through an illicit act which was not acceptable in the staunch Afghan society. Baba had broken the norms of the parochial Afghan land and he needed to suffer in silence for his sin. Hassan now belonged to Hazarajat and it was not possible for him to keep Hassan close to him any longer. His strong exterior breaks at the loss of his son and Amir is taken aback to see Baba, who was an embodiment of masculinity, break down- "Then I saw Baba do something I had never seen him do before. He cried. It scared me a little, seeing a grown man sob. Fathers weren't supposed to cry. "Please," Baba was saying, but Ali had already turned to the door, Hassan trailing him. I'll never forget the way Baba said that, the pain in his plea, the fear". (Hosseini *The Kite Runner* 93).

Gloria Jean Watkins, better known by her pen name Bell Hooks, talks about how men are also victims of patriarchy in her book, *The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*:

Patriarchal mores teach a form of emotional stoicism to men that says they are more manly if they do not feel, but if by chance they should feel and the feelings hurt, the manly response is to stuff them down, to forget about them, to hope they go away...Patriarchy demands of men that they become and remain emotional cripples. Since it is a system that denies men full access to

their freedom of will, it is difficult for any man of any class to rebel against patriarchy. (Hooks 27)

Baba too was a victim of patriarchy. Hassan's subalternity and the chain of patriarchy that was ingrained in him since forever, prevented him from realizing the need for atonement. He suffered yet he was not conditioned to own up to the truth that he had impregnated a Hazara woman and Hassan was his son. He engaged in philanthropic activities and though he didn't realize it, subconsciously it was to make up for his sin. Building an orphanage and offering help to the needy was his way to atone himself. Though he would have attained atonement in the real sense if only he had accepted Hassan as his son and had bridged the Hazara-Pashtun gap. It is evident from his friend and confidante Rahim Khan's letter which he writes to Amir:

But your father was a man torn between two halves, Amir jan: you and Hassan. He loved you both, but he could not love Hassan the way he longed to, openly, and as a father. So, he took it out on you instead- Amir, the socially legitimate half, the half that represented the riches he had inherited and the sin-with-impunity privileges that came with them. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 263)

Thus, it is evident that Hassan's subalternity owing to his Hazara ethnicity is a roadblock towards Baba's atonement. Subaltern undercurrents in the novel play a pivotal role in how the characters act and react. The class dynamics in the Afghan community propel the protagonists to behave in a certain way. In this case, we can gauge that had it not been for the class divide and clear demarcation between the elite and the poor, things would have been different for Baba, Amir, Hassan, and even Ali. And what is noteworthy is that this is due to years of institutionalised conditioning wherein one class establishes an upper hand over another class leading to the generational norm of subjugation. This class conflict in terms of subalternity is discussed in depth in the chapter titled, Race, Class and, Religion- Gramsci's conception of Subalternity from the book, *The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and B.R. Ambedkar: Itineraries of Dalits and Subalterns*:

In contrast to current interpretations, the 'subaltern' is not simply a code word devised out of prison censorship. When Gramsci's notes in *Notebook 25* are understood in relation to the recurring themes in the *Prison Notebooks*, it becomes apparent that race, class, and religion are central to his understanding of subalternity...His analysis of subalternity initiates a line of investigation that examines the political function intellectuals perform in perpetuating, legitimizing, and reinforcement the subordination of one social group by another through the dissemination of national, colonial, racial and religious narratives. (Zene 116–28)

Class segregation is a significant factor which leads to the creation of a subaltern psyche. In *The Kite Runner* too it defines the subtle divide between the Pashtun and Hazara protagonists. It is this gap which is difficult to bridge and which leads to the conscious and subconscious alienation of the lower class, thereby forming a subaltern group. In *The Kite Runner*, subalternity is an enduring force in the quest for atonement. Hassan's subalternity makes the estrangement between him and Amir possible and eventually, it is his subaltern nature which leads to his untimely death.

4.4 Nana's Subalternity and Jalil's Atonement

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini has delineated the plight of the marginalized women of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been in a state of perpetual internal and external conflict. Belligerent forces (be it the Soviet conquest or the Taliban reign) made the people of Afghanistan face turbulence and terror. In a patriarchal society like Afghanistan, women were the ones who had to suffer the wrath of the militant forces. Unfair and despotic rules were imposed on them and they were robbed of their basic rights. Hosseini has tried to capture this deplorable state of Afghanistan through the story of two Afghan women Mariam and Laila. The story spans through almost thirty years wherein we are exposed to the state of affairs during the Soviet reign, years of civil wars, and finally the tyrannical rule of the Taliban. While the story is told through the voices of Mariam and Laila, there are other women characters as well who show elements of subalternity. Mariam's mother Nana is depicted as a scorned woman who suffers owing to the stigma around her social stature which is further accentuated by the birth of her illegitimate daughter. Her

subalternity plays a vital role in how Mariam's life turns out. Pushed to a small hut on the outskirts of the city, she lives literally and figuratively at the fringes of society. Hosseini does not shy away from drawing the true picture of women's subjugation and harassment during the Soviet reign only to be followed by the Taliban's staunch establishment.

Author Wali M. Rahimi in *Status of Women: Afghanistan*, offers substantial evidence to portray how the stature of women in erstwhile Afghan society was appalling:

The position of women in Afghanistan has traditionally been inferior to that of men. This position has varied according to age, socio-cultural norms, and ethnicity. In fact, Afghan women, even until the beginning of the 20th century were the slaves of their father, husband, father-in-law, and elder brother. Her most valued characteristic was silence and obedience...Girls were usually raised to be good mothers and tolerant housewives. Thus no one paid any attention to their education, except in very rare cases in some well-to-do families. They were married to young and even very old men in most cases, wealthy ones between the ages of 13 and 16, and in certain cases, between the ages of 10 and 12, if their parents desired. (Rahimi 6)

The persistent aggression and the patriarchy that was embedded in the Afghan culture made the people especially women easy prey for subalternity. Women were already under the clutches of a patriarchal society. And when external forces emerged, they were further subjugated. Nana is one such woman portrayed by Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* who suffers owing to her inferior status. When she is impregnated by a rich businessman Jalil Khan, she is the one who bears the brunt of giving birth to a bastard child. Gender subalternity is what makes her a victim. Moreover, social stratification which was clearly defined in the Afghan social structure leads to further alienation of Nana. In the thesis titled, *Social Stratification in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns* the researcher throws light on how social classification draws boundaries separating one class from another. Employing social stratification theory, it is established:

The social stratification in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, has three dimensions: class, status, and power. The class is based on the wealth and ownership of economic resources, the status is based on the social prestige of lifestyle, and the power is based on the ability to dominate and control others. The characters in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be divided into three classes. In the upper class, a character named Jalil owns vast lands, companies, properties, cinema, and much money. In the middle class are Rasheed, Hakim, and Tariq who earn enough but only own a small amount of wealth to live. In the lower class are Nana...they do not have any wealth and skills that can help them survive during the economic crisis of Afghanistan. (Rizki)

It is thus evident that Nana lacked in class, status, and power. She therefore lives an impoverished life in a *kolba* away from the main city. On the surface, Jalil is depicted as an affluent man who impregnates and abandons his child's mother. But on a closer look, we gauge that he was a slave of patriarchy. He could never muster up the courage to defy the generational norms of the Afghan society. Yet he shows traces of guilt and attempts to atone himself. The biggest hurdle to his atonement is Nana's angst and her subalternity. Someone who is alienated and made a subaltern on account of her gender, ethnicity, and status is bound to be disgruntled. Nana became a subaltern quite early on when she was shamed for her disease. She had Epilepsy and she was cornered by people owing to her disease. The stigma around her disease was the cause of her abandonment by her prospective groom. Her struggle with the disease is shown in the following lines:

Then a week before a wedding date, a *jinn* had entered Nana's body...Nana collapsing suddenly, her body tightening, becoming rigid, her eyes rolling back, her arms and leg shaking as if something was throttling her from the inside, the froth at the corners of her mouth, white, sometimes pink with blood. Then the drowsiness, the frightening disorientation, the incoherent mumbling. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 10)

Nana's debilitating disease pushes her to the fringe quite early on. The taboo around the disease was so strong that Nana was treated with contempt owing to her symptoms. As a report by the National Library of Medicine mentions:

The stigma associated with epilepsy includes both the stigma experienced by epilepsy patients and the community's attitudes and beliefs about them. Patients with epilepsy may feel ashamed and embarrassed if they have a seizure in public due to symptoms such as limb shaking, staring spells, chewing, and urinary/bowel incontinence. Unfortunately, they face prejudice and stigma from others as well because they are perceived as insane, possessed by evil spirits, and having weak minds. The word "epilepsy" conjures up images of a person having fits (seizures) at any time, which has a negative impact on their social relations and quality of life. People with epilepsy (PWE) who live in underprivileged areas, unfortunately, do not receive appropriate care, which often results in their illness remaining untreated, affecting both their physical and psychological health. (Malik et al.)

Clearly, a woman like Nana who belonged to the lower rung of society, was made into a subaltern not just due to her ethnicity but also due to her ailment. As a woman suffering from a chronic disease, she was marginalized further. In Post-Colonial Studies, disability and disease are regarded and investigated with respect to marginalization. Spivak's theory of subalternity which is the theoretical edifice of this research is also employed to study the same and draw parallels between the two. Subalterns are defined as those who do not get a representation and a voice in the society. Disabled and diseased sections of the society too are rendered subaltern as they are excluded and looked at with derision thereby robbing them of an agency. The Research article, *Spivak and Rethinking the Agency of Disabled Children* probes into this aspect:

From a critical disability studies perspective, disabled people have been historically absent from the narrative – physically and metaphorically. If present at all, they are representative of the grotesque, and in the light of the tragic, of the horrors of a life that is less than that of the normative 'other'...

Within postcolonial studies, the non-representation of disability continues to

hold space, and therein exists a gap of theoretical understandings with this clear lack of critical understanding. In itself disability is viewed as a 'master metaphor for social ills'... What the study of *subalternity* offers us from a critical disability studies perspective is that both the disabled person in everyday life and the colonised in Spivak's essay occupy similar spaces in both the political sense and in the sense of subject formation that is characterised as that of a marginalised subject position. (Kowitz)

Thus, Nana was made a subaltern in Afghan society when she was a young girl. Consequently, she was forever embittered. Destiny does not offer her any consolation when she is pushed to a small hut to live as a single mother of an illegitimate child. Nana vents out her angst on both Mariam and Jalil. Jalil is crippled by the Afghani patriarchy to accept Nana and Mariam. But he tries to make amends by sending regular supplies and visiting Mariam frequently. Nana realizes that he is seeking atonement for his transgressions when she says, "His idea of penance." (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 11). But her subaltern angst- wherein she did not have an agency and could not voice out against the injustice meted out to her- makes her a cynic. This becomes a roadblock to Jalil's redemption. Eventually, Nana takes her life when Mariam goes to Herat to visit Jalil. Her insecurity and the fact that she could lose her only daughter makes her take the drastic step. With her demise, Jalil's sins are left unatoned. It is much later after leading a hard life amidst wars and bloodshed, that he tries to ask forgiveness from his daughter and redeem himself for good.

4.5 Mariam's Subalternity: An Impediment to her Final Atonement

Mariam is one of the protagonists in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* who is a subaltern. She is put down constantly as a child owing to her illegitimate birth. Her own mother contributes to her alienation by calling her names like 'harami.' It is already been established above as to how Mariam's mother Nana behaves in that way as she is a victim of marginalization herself. Nevertheless, her behaviour negatively affects Mariam and makes her guilt-ridden. Mariam subconsciously considers herself the reason for all that befell her mother. This thought torments her to no end and pushes her towards subalternity. Being a woman in a country with patriarchal under currents, she is deprived of a life that was her right. Her biological father is a rich businessman

who lives in luxury with his other wives and children. He visits her regularly and she adores him. Yet he is not courageous enough to accept her as his daughter due to societal norms. Polygamy, which was a rampant practise in Afghanistan enables him to keep more than one wife. Later, the practise of polygamy makes Mariam suffer too when her husband marries another woman, Laila. His actions are justifiable in the Afghan society. But it corners women and leave them agonized.

Mariam's woes begin quite early in life and just when one thinks her life might get better, her condition is deteriorated by the twist of fate. Her father whom she reveres, marries her off to a much older man because after Nana's demise, he is unable to muster up the courage to give refuge to his illegitimate daughter. It is evident that in the male-dominated Afghan society women are treated as mere commodities. Once Mariam is married off to a much older man her life deteriorates and she is treated in an inhumanly manner. Her father and his wives do not think twice before sending a, fifteen- year- old Mariam with Rashid, a man in his forties.

Life with Rashid becomes unbearable for Mariam. Drunk in patriarchy, Rashid lays down staunch rules for a naïve Mariam. Thereafter, he indulges in marital rape by enforcing himself upon Mariam who is not even old enough to understand the nitty gritty of a marital relationship:

“There is no shame in this, Mariam,” he said, slurring a little. “It’s what married people do. It’s what the Prophet himself and his wives did. There is no shame.” A few moments later, he pushed back the blanket and left the room, leaving her with the impression of his head on her pillow, leaving her to wait out the pain down below, to look at the frozen stars in the sky and a cloud that draped the face of the moon like a wedding veil. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 76)

Thereafter, she is expected to ‘start performing like a wife’ (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 63). She is expected to procreate and preferably a male progeny as a male heir would be able to carry forward the family name. But when Mariam loses a child and eventually fails to conceive, Rashid's behaviour becomes further more indifferent. He treats her with contempt and becomes oblivious to her presence.

Mariam's position in the house gradually becomes akin to a house cat. She also tolerates Rashid's short-tempered behaviour and his violent outbursts. She bears his physical abuse silently as she has no one for support. Lack of agency makes her a subaltern and prevents her from retaliation and retribution. One needs to have a voice and be at peace with oneself to atone oneself. But Mariam was perpetually living under the shadow of fear. She was also not educated enough which further hinders her growth and makes her voiceless. All these factors which push her towards subalternity act as roadblocks in her journey towards redemption.

Later when Rashid marries a much younger girl, Mariam is infuriated. She tries to voice out her disapproval. But her opinion is quashed. A subaltern who is never accorded an agency, Mariam's rights are opinions are trampled:

“She's too young. You're too old. This is nonsense.”

I am too old. Too old for you to do this to me,” Mariam said, balling up fistfuls of her dress so tightly her hands shook. “For you, after all these years, to make me an ambagh.”

“Don't be so dramatic. It's a common thing and you know it. I have friends who have two, three, four wives. Your own father had three. Besides, what I am doing now most men I know would have done long ago. You know it's true.” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 134)

Thus, it is not that Mariam does not attempt to break the shackles of her subaltern status. But, as Spivak also mentions in an argument about subalternity if a subaltern is able to speak up and her voice is heard then he/she would cease to be a subaltern. In the same vein, had Rasheed respected Mariam and paid heed to her choices and decisions, she would have been free of her subaltern nature. But he continues to be a husband who gaslights and jeers at his wife as he is conditioned to do the same in the parochial Aghan society. Thereafter Mariam continues to live in the same house with her husband's new young wife Laila. In the thesis titled, *Rasheed's aggression over his wives in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the researcher explores the reasons behind Rasheed's aggressive behaviour, by taking the aid of three theories namely Ethological Theory, Drive Theory, and Social Learning Theory. According to

the thesis, Ethological Theory is based on the physiological aspect of the aggressor. In this case, Ethological Theory would imply that Rasheed's physical appearance and biological influence would impact his behaviour. His burly structure and the presence of a gun in his house act as influencing factors towards his aggressive attitude. The Drive Theory proposes that Rasheed's aggression would have been an outcome of his frustration which stemmed out of the loss of his son and the lack of resources and financial stability in the later years. The Social Learning Theory reveals that aggression more often than not stems out of the surroundings. When the environment around the aggressor is steeped in domination it is bound to affect the behavioural aspect of the people. In this case, the male-dominated Afghan society of which Rasheed was a part, led him to imbibe the same violent temperament which he witnessed around him. (Pangarsa Andreas)

Thus, Rasheed's behaviour pushes Mariam towards subalternity and she leads a sad life. It is only much later when Rasheed marries a young Laila that Mariam finds a purpose in life. It is interesting that though initially, she looks at Laila with disbelief, it is this young girl who gives her a purpose to live. Her unadulterated love offers respite to Mariam who had been ridiculed and made to believe that she is of no value to anyone. Laila's daughter Aziza makes her a mother figure and she realizes for the first time in her life that she could be loved by someone sans any vested interest. A subaltern is made to feel that he/she deserves to live a life charted out by the elite suppressor. But this is not enough to break her subalternity which is a hurdle on her path to happiness. While Mariam and Laila form a sisterhood of sorts, the political environment of Afghanistan shifts. With the advent of the Taliban government, Mariam is further entrenched in subalternity. Though both men and women are deeply affected by the laws enforced by the government, women get the short end of the stick. Mariam had by then gotten used to Rasheed's abuse and had become adept at walking around eggshells when he was around. She had found a confidante in Laila and they had become a family. But the Taliban reign deteriorates her state further. The despotic regime imposes unfair rules on women. This makes Mariam's life even more difficult. The Talib hegemony corners her further robbing her from doing away with her subalternity.

Owing to the changing political scene, Rasheed becomes financially unstable. He is unable to provide for all the members of the house. As per the new law, women are not allowed to work outdoors. Hence, he sends the young Aziza to an orphanage to both Mariam and Laila's dismay. His frustration peaks and his atrocities against both the women heighten too. Mariam who had hitherto been a picture of endurance, finds herself moved by the sufferings of Laila and her children. Silence is the hallmark of a subaltern. And Mariam had been one throughout her difficult life. Yet when Laila who has had a different upbringing exemplifies resistance, something in Mariam shifts. While patriarchy and Talib hegemony made her a subaltern, sisterhood, and love steered her towards breaking the shackles of subalternity. Mariam remains a victim all through her life and gender subalternity shapes her life and corners her. But, towards the end when she realizes that Rasheed would not stop before taking Laila's life, she takes the extreme step:

Had Mariam been certain that he would be satisfied with shooting only her, that there was a chance he would spare Laila, she might have dropped the shovel. But in Rasheed's eyes, she saw murder for them both. And so, Mariam raised the shovel high, raised it as high as she could, arching it so it touched the small of her back. She turned it so the sharp edge was vertical, and as she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time that *she* was deciding the course of her own life. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 340-341)

While Laila is someone who is depicted as spirited and as someone who constantly questions Rasheed's ideals, in the end, one is taken by surprise to see Mariam emerge as someone who breaks the cycle of patriarchy and gender subalternity. While in prison, Mariam is almost revered by her cell-mates as most of them were serving sentences for petty crimes like 'running away from home.' They see Mariam as a woman who dares to stand against systemic oppression and marginalization.

We can therefore conclude that subalternity is an enduring force in the life of Mariam which prevents her from atoning herself and making her life worthwhile. Yet in the end, when she breaks free of her subaltern nature and takes things in her hand, she attains redemption in the true sense. It is also important to note here that though Hosseini draws the character of Mariam to exhibit the plight of Afghan women and

how subalternity had rendered them voiceless, he also aimed to portray that these 'third world women' attempted to raise their heads too. They were victims of their dire circumstances but they wanted an agency. In the paper, *Post Colonial Feminist Reading of Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns* it is argued as to how Western feminists have stereotyped the portrayal of women in the third world countries. They are assumed to be docile and muted. But the researcher in the above-mentioned paper through the works of Spivak asserts that the inability of subalterns to voice out their stand does not imply that they do not speak. It means that despite speaking they are not heard and their voice is belittled and ignored by the hegemonic powers. (Seifi)

Through Mariam's portrayal, Hosseini defies the notion that subaltern women do not resist. They may remain, subalterns, because the oppressor chooses to not pay heed to their opinions. Subalternity hampers their sense of atonement which in Mariam's case was the ultimate sacrifice to ensure a better life for Laila and her family. In giving away her life Mariam finds atonement which had hitherto been roadblocked by her gender subalternity.

4.6 Laila's Subalternity: An Enduring Force in her Quest for Atonement

Laila is another pivotal protagonist who yearns for to atone herself but is suppressed owing to gender subalternity. She is depicted as a courageous woman who finds it hard to succumb to Rasheed's ideologies and patriarchal outlook as she was raised by a liberal father. Unlike Mariam, she had a happy childhood and she never witnessed patriarchy in her home. Her father was an educationist who instilled in her a free spirit and told her the importance of being educated and opinionated. But when her parents are killed, her fate takes her towards a thorny road. Political upheaval disintegrates her life and she soon finds herself married to a much older married man. Though Laila always spoke her mind, she too is eventually made to bow down to subalternity in a country reeling with subjugation. As if she was already not suppressed enough, under the four walls of her home, Taliban rules further worsened her situation.

Hosseini draws Laila's character to portray how she is not a silent sufferer and is someone who has her share of opinions. She is appalled when women are exempted from working outside. She speaks her mind, being fully aware of her husband

Rasheed's ideologies. Yet there is so much she could do to thwart the gender subalternity faced by her. The socio-political scene of erstwhile Afghanistan was not conducive enough for a lone woman to raise her voice. And so, her subalternity acts as an obstacle which prevents her ultimate atonement. It is not that Laila does not strive to atone herself but she fails owing to the extreme circumstances she is faced with. The only reason she agrees to marry and stay with Rasheed is because she finds out that she is carrying Tariq's child. And later she hatches a plan to run away from Rasheed's house which is a remarkable act of resistance. She had the guts to walk away from her subaltern status and leave her abusive house. She also wanted to take Mariam along and give her a better life. Yet patriarchy and gender subalternity stop her from breaking free. She is caught by the Afghan authorities. The following conversation gives us a peek into how Taliban had imposed unfair laws on women. Women were left with no free-will and were treated as mere commodities who were supposed to live under the stranglehold of their male guardians:

"Let us go, Officer..." She read the name on his lapel tag. "Officer Rahman. Honor the meaning of your name and show compassion. What does it matter to you to let a mere two women go? What's the harm in releasing us. We are not criminals."

"I can't."

"I beg you, please."

"It's a matter of qanoon, *hamshira*, a matter of law."

"If you send us back," she said instead, slowly, "there is no saying what he will do to us."

She could see the effort it took him to keep his eyes from shifting. "What a man does in his home is his business."

"What about the law then, Officer Rahman?" Tears of rage strung her eyes.

"Will you be there to maintain order?"

"As a matter of policy, we do not interfere with private family matters, *hamshira*."

“Of course you don’t. When it benefits the man. And isn’t this a ‘private family matter’, as you say isn’t it?” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 259-260)

Through the above extract one gets a clear picture of the plight of women in Afghanistan. The authorities too turned a deaf ear to the troubles that befell women. Owing to this, Laila who tries tooth and nail to defy the oppression, is also made a victim due to her gender subalternity. The research paper, *Gender Subalternity in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns*, also delves in the same aspect and talks about how gender subalternity is entrenched in the very fabric of Afghan society leaving women voiceless:

Overall, Gender Subalternity begins when the interpersonal communication fails to achieve its objective. This is due to the presence of element of noise in the shape of social, cultural, and socio-economic factors. The distortion of communication by noise results in the failure of interpretation of the message that is being conveyed by the speaker. Ultimately, the sexed subalterns lose their voice and cannot speak. (Kenas* and Lin)

Laila suffers abuse and misogyny as she is left with no option. Not just her husband Rasheed, she and the other Afghan women are made subalterns by the entire Afghan regime. With the advent of the Taliban, Laila’s situation becomes even more deplorable. Her daughter is put into a dilapidated orphanage to make ends meet. Something as simple as paying a visit to her daughter becomes an ordeal for her in the Afghan society. Owing to the new laws, she could not roam around the city without a male companion. As valiant as Laila is, she is unable to push away the violence meted out to her due to her subalternity:

One day, a young Talib beat Laila with a radio antenna. When he was done, he gave a final whack to the back of her neck and said, “I see you again, I’ll beat you until your mother’s milk leaks out of your bones....” Sometimes she was caught, questioned, scolded—two, three, even four times in a single day. Then the whips came down and the antennas sliced through the air, and she trudged home, bloodied, without so much as a glimpse of Aziza. Soon Laila took to

wearing extra layers, even in the heat, two, three sweaters beneath the burqa for padding against the beatings. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 313-314)

A 2009 report by UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) also delves into the dire state of women in Afghanistan. Though the report focuses on how the condition of women did not drastically improve even after the end of Taliban reign, it reiterates as to how the extent of atrocities on women during the Talib rule were unimaginable. The report goes on to delve into the abominable state of Afghan women and how the socio-cultural scenario of Afghanistan coupled with the despotic regime robbed women of their basic rights. Gender subalternity not only resulted in pushing the women away from participating in public life but it also led to heinous crimes against women. Hosseini has vividly put this grim reality in the book through the lives of the women characters. The report states:

Taliban understanding or interpretation of Islam, however, further institutionalized the marginalization of women. Throughout its harsh, five-year rule, the Taliban's extreme interpretation of Sharia, based on a distorted and oppressive version of Islam, attempted to change the essence of Afghan society to that of a fundamentalist and repressive system of governance where Taliban edicts reigned supreme. Taliban rule was particularly harsh in urban centres where women, in particular, were victimized and were reduced to a shadowy existence. Women and girls were subjected to systematic discrimination that, effectively, confined most females to their homes. Females were not permitted out in public unless accompanied by a mahram. The contemporary situation of Afghan women is shaped by harmful traditional practices, many of which precede Islam. Such practices and related perspectives contradict the fundamental tenets of Islam but have served to suppress women, restrict their movements outside the home, leave them vulnerable in the face of violence, and violate their basic human rights. (Imran and Ismail)

Laila becomes a victim to the above stated misogyny and suffers assault both at the hands of Rasheed and the Talibs. Her subaltern status keeps her away from her

daughter. Yet she tries tooth and nail to meet her daughter even at the cost of being thrashed inhumanly. Subalternity therefore becomes an enduring force in this regard. But Hosseini does not merely show the atrocities Afghan women had to bear during the repressive reign of Taliban, he also portrays the spirit of the Afghan women who despite of being marginalized make an effort to fight back. Laila too displays exemplary courage and it is because of Laila's support that Mariam too musters up the courage to take the extreme step. The sisterhood formed by the two women- both stuck in the vicious circle of subalternity- steers them forward amidst the not so conducive socio-political environment of erstwhile Afghanistan. Laila walks on the road to atonement when she is freed from the clutches of Taliban despotism. Later she comes back to Afghanistan and works for the reconstruction of her homeland. She could have led a comfortable life away from Afghanistan. Yet she chooses to come back as she realizes that she ought to make a difference and should not let Mariam's ultimate sacrifice go in vain. By working for the upliftment of Afghan society which was in shambles post- Taliban rule, she finds true atonement. Laila was raised by a feminist father who instilled in her a sense of duty towards her motherland. She could not turn away from her country and so she goes on to relinquish subalternity and is able to find fulfilment in working towards making Afghanistan a better place for the future generation.

Yet Hosseini drives home the fact that subalternity proved disastrous for Afghan women who were crippled and subjugated to no end. Laila's journey too gives us a vivid peek into the life of an Afghan woman marred by constant wars and political turmoil. Therefore, we can deduce that subalternity was an enduring force in the life of not just Laila but most Afghan women living under the shadow of patriarchy and colonization. Hosseini thus successfully depicts not just the struggles of women in a war-ravaged country but also breaks the stereotypical Western image of women of the third world as being submissive. Laila displays resistance and though after years of suffering owing to her subalternity, she is able to atone herself by working for the upliftment of Afghanistan. "Hosseini's females represent the life of ordinary women who are subjected to and suffer from various forms of violence, oppression, and

subservience, and at last break the manmade skeleton of sociocultural and sociopolitical hegemonic control over their bodies and soul.” (Imran and Ismail)

4.7 Saboor’s Subalternity and his inability to find Atonement

Hosseini has yet again portrayed an array of characters in his third novel *And the Mountains Echoed*. Like his previous novels here too we find multiple characters steeped in subalternity. The novel begins with a story and at once we are made privy to the dilemma of a poor subaltern man Saboor, who is so desperate that he has to unwillingly give away his daughter so that the rest of his family can survive. The constant scuffles and the reign of colonial powers had made the financial condition of the people of Afghanistan bleak. Amidst such circumstances, Saboor gives away his daughter Pari to the rich Wahdati family. But he never recovers from the guilt of abandoning his little girl. He suffers till the time he is alive, breaking all ties with his brother-in-law Nabi who was in a way instrumental in Pari’s adoption. Through Saboor, Hosseini wished to represent an average Afghan citizen belonging to the lower strata of the erstwhile Afghan society who to grapple with the severe winter and poverty, is forced to take the extreme step of selling away his own flesh and blood. Hosseini shares the same in an interview wherein he shares his intention and idea behind the story of Saboor and his children:

I went to Afghanistan with a UN Refugee Agency to visit with returning refugees in Afghanistan and visited a number of villages where I met people who were trying to make a living, restart their lives in Afghanistan. After being away for a long time, one particular aspect of that that struck me was the lengths to which people went to survive the winters which are so brutal and so cold in Afghanistan. And in every community, I went they would lose routinely five to ten-ten children every winter because of the really unforgiving elements. And so, when I came home after that trip I started thinking about what I have heard ..and an idea took place of a family living in a remote village in Afghanistan and having to make a decision, a decision that for most of us would be unbearable and almost unthinkable. And yet they have to make this decision for the survival of the family. (Canada)

Saboor's decision is what sets into motion the heartbreak and separation of two siblings. But, Saboor himself is burdened with guilt as he is unable to provide for his children. Here Saboor is a subaltern who is marginalized owing to his economic stature. A clear class difference is seen between Saboor's family and that of the affluent Wahdatis. This huge fissure between the rich and the poor is what makes Saboor a subaltern. He has no aid from the State and no means to participate in the functioning of the government as he is caught up struggling to make ends meet. Poverty and neglect by the State also push one towards subalternity. The paper titled *Introduction. "Learning to Learn from Below": Understanding Subalternity* talks about subalternity at length. Though it speaks about the concept of a subaltern in the Indian context wherein the researcher talks about the cast narrative, it also touches upon the aspect that lack of resources and absolute oblivion of the State too contributes remarkably to push people on the fringes. It states, "Subaltern citizens include those who are marginalized and live at the edge of marginality itself. The State has almost no interest in their welfare and there is no provision for their employment, food security, education, health care, or any form of livelihood except what they might garner themselves from meagre daily wage." (Thapan)

Saboor too has meagre resources and gets a paltry sum of money through daily wages depending upon the work he gets. It is evident from Abdullah's statement about how his father had perpetually been on the lookout for work trying to make a livelihood. "As long as Abdullah could remember, Father was out searching for work, knocking on doors for a day's labour. He had overheard Father one time tell the village elder, Mullah Shekib, *If I had been born an animal, Mullah Sahib, I swear I would have come out a mule.*" (Hosseini, *And The Mountains Echoed* 27)

Saboor's subalternity therefore not only propelled him to make a dire decision of selling his little daughter and separating the inseparable siblings, but it also prevented him from making peace with himself. After giving away Pari, Saboor's condition doesn't improve drastically. He is still stuck in the vicious circle of poverty. So much so that, he has to cut his favourite oak tree to get the wood for sustaining the tough Afghan winters. Had Saboor been supported by the State, things would have turned out differently for him. But all he could do was pine for his daughter. As a male in an

Afghan patriarchal society, he is not even expected to grieve openly. Thus, he dies without meeting his daughter, with a guilt-ridden heart, as a suffering subaltern.

4.8 Nila Wahdati's Gender Subalternity and her Failure to Redeem Herself

One of the most complex characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* is Nila Wahdati, the bold poetess who stands out like a sore thumb in the parochial Afghan land. Nila is depicted by Hosseini as a flawed woman. At no point, did Hosseini attempt to make a moral judgment of sorts. Yet it is evident that Nila is a victim of gender subalternity. In a society where women were expected to be hidden behind a veil, Nila had the courage to be passionate about her art. She did not shy away from defying all the rules set out for women in Afghanistan. Yet even someone as enlightened and self-assured as Nila feels that she is stuck in a narrow-minded society. Nila is never given due credit for her poetry in Afghanistan and she is shamed by her father for having a rebellious streak and for going against the norm. Gender subalternity hits her hard and it is much later when she moves to Paris with her adopted daughter, that she is acknowledged for her creative brilliance. But the harm had already been done by then. Living in a country where she had been constantly put down and shamed for her actions, she becomes scarred. The brunt of her complex persona is borne by her adoptive daughter Pari all through her life. Even after escaping from Afghanistan, Nila is unable to find happiness and is never truly able to atone herself. Having never gotten any validation from her country and family, she eventually dies by suicide in a foreign land.

Women were dual subalterns in countries like Afghanistan. Hosseini goes on to depict the intriguing facet that for a woman can be a subaltern even if she hails from the so-called elite class. Nila had an agency and she could speak her mind. Yet she was never heard in the patriarchal Afghan society. As a result, she has to leave her homeland. In France, she is acknowledged for her craft but the years of endurance and schooling in her homeland leave a bitter taste in her mouth. Here we can infer that had she not been a prey to subalternity, Nila would have been a different person. She would have lived a happy life and would in turn have given a normal childhood to her daughter Pari, in her own country. To run away from her subaltern status in Afghanistan, Nila adopts Pari and moves to France hoping that she will find

fulfillment and a purpose with Pari in tow. But her childhood demons and the scars given inadvertently by gender subalternity do not let her redeem herself. Pari is confounded by her eccentricity and she questions her:

What was I, Maman? Pari thinks. What was I supposed to be, growing in your womb- assuming it was even in your womb that I was conceived? A seed of hope? A ticket purchased to ferry you from the dark? A patch for that hole you carried in your heart? If so, then I wasn't enough. I wasn't nearly enough. I was no balm to your pain, only another dead end, another burden, and you must have seen that early on. (Hosseini *And the Mountains Echoed* 220-221)

4.9 Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, 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. Atonement had different meanings for the myriad characters in Hosseini's novels. For Amir in *The Kite Runner*, it meant absolving his sins, for Mariam it meant saving Laila from oppression and patriarchy and doing something of purpose in her otherwise bleak life. For Laila, true atonement meant not ruining the second chance at life and making a difference by doing something for her homeland. For Saboor and Abdullah, atonement would have become possible by reuniting with Pari and making amends for abandoning her. Yet we see that the road to atonement is formidable for all these characters owing to their subalternity. As a matter of fact, more often than not, it is their lack of agency and subjugation that leads them to engage in such transgressions in the first place. 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 were fictional, they aided considerably in bringing to the Western world the true and humane picture of Afghanistan.

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CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS



After a thorough analysis of the works of Khaled Hosseini, it can be concluded that Hosseini delineated the humane side of Afghanistan. He has confessed that he began writing his first novel *The Kite Runner* before the 9/11 attack and that he stopped writing the same thinking it would be in poor taste. (Smith) Yet, he ended up finishing the book as he felt that at that juncture it was even more important to debunk the myths associated with Afghanistan which was then looked at with utter disbelief. Afghanistan has been a country wrought with wars and the brunt of it has been borne by the people. Though Hosseini himself is an exile writer, he felt responsible for bringing to light the predicament of the people who suffered while the battle for power ensued. The reign of the Taliban was like a final nail in the coffin that took away fundamental rights from Afghan people. While men were made to adhere to certain rules, women were shoved further in an already patriarchal society. Hosseini has depicted the plight of women during the despotic Talib rule in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* wherein two women Mariam and Laila become his mouthpieces. Through them Hosseini made us live the agony of being a woman in a patriarchal country run by an autocratic regime. When the Talib reign came to an end with US intervention and a democratic government was established in 2001, it appeared that Afghanistan was on its way to becoming a stable land. But the prosperity and freedom were rather short-lived. In 2021, the US forces left Afghanistan, leaving in their wake complete pandemonium. (Ap)

Taliban reign was established again in 2021 and after twenty years, Afghanistan was yet again under the aegis of Taliban. The Sharia law, which Khaled Hosseini has captured vividly in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was re-established. (Kabul) It was as if history was repeating itself. Thus, Khaled Hosseini's novels- which dig into life during the Soviet rule and the Taliban period of the 90s-become relevant yet again.

The current research delves into an in-depth analysis of the fictional works of Khaled Hosseini. But it is already established in the previous chapters as to how the novels though fiction, are steeped in reality. The characters of Hassan, Mariam, Laila, Saboor, Abdullah, Pari, Nila and many more are all representations of Afghan people from varied classes and ethnicities. Together they reflect the face of erstwhile Afghanistan and give one a peek into the ground realities faced by the Afghan people in a country wrought with incessant scuffles and invasions. The research in hand is

also pertinent because the year 2021 saw mayhem and took one twenty years back in time when the Taliban had seized power in the 1990s. It is sad that all the advancements and growth that Afghanistan saw in the last twenty years was curbed and women's rights suffered a major setback. At this juncture, subaltern perspective becomes relevant as in an autocratic regime both men and women are rendered subalterns. In the study at hand, the subaltern theories are an aid which highlight as to how being devoid of an agency hampers one to redeem oneself of any transgressions. The research also helped bring things into perspective in the context of subalternity vis a vis the various obstacles faced by the myriads of characters brought to life by Hosseini.

5.1 Relevance of the Research and Re-Establishment of the Taliban

While the research is focused on the theme of atonement concerning subaltern voices, one cannot overlook the fact that owing to the 2021 withdrawal of US forces, the relevance of this research is manifold. Khaled Hosseini's fictional characters span through generations and though he aimed to talk about families, grief, and human relations, Afghan militancy lurks through the narrative taking the shape of another character. When the Taliban was reinstated in August 2021, marking an end to the twenty-year stranglehold of the US, it was as if Afghanistan was shoved back to the dark era of the 90s. We are at once transported to the troubled times depicted by Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The protagonists Mariam and Laila were both victims of the ire of the Taliban and were subjected to assault and suffering. When the US forces left the Afghan soil, there was complete chaos. People hustled to jump on the planes to move away from Afghanistan as they could sense what the future held for them. It resulted in several casualties while the Taliban maintained that the people of Afghanistan were safe. Yet it was difficult for people to obliterate from their minds the aftermaths of the Taliban's previous reign. Their dictatorial and regressive rule impacted Afghanistan negatively both in terms of women's rights and overall growth. (PBS)

Hosseini was devastated at how the withdrawal of US forces came about. He described the Taliban takeover of 2021 as 'absolutely gut-wrenching'. Furthermore, he added, that he was skeptical about the Taliban rule and that the group would have to show that they are different this time, 'with deeds and not with words'. He was also

concerned about Afghan refugees and he mentioned, “I think I would call on all countries to keep their borders open and to welcome Afghan refugees who are fleeing 40 years of violence and persecution. This moment is not the time to give up on Afghanistan. It is not the time to turn your backs on Afghans and Afghan refugees.” (Scully) Being an exile writer and someone who was a refugee himself once, he could relate and sympathize with the plight of his fellow countrymen.

The people of Afghanistan feared that the Taliban would replicate their previous reign and yet again impose the most radical interpretation of Islamic law. And unfortunately, their apprehensions turned to facts in no time. Within a few months of getting into power, the militant group curbed women’s rights and nullified the development in terms of women's education and emancipation that came to be for the last twenty years. For the people of Afghanistan, it was all a grim reminder of their previous reign which lasted from 1996 to 2001. The draconian rules and the barbarian punishments aimed at anyone defying those rules were horrid memories for the Afghans. The moral policing and stringent dress code for both men and women were too vividly described by Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*. It is appalling that in 2021, twenty years after their previous reign, when the world has progressed, the same laws are imposed on Afghans. In December 2021, just months after coming to power, the Taliban announced that Afghan women wishing to travel more than seventy-two kilometers should not be given transport facilities until and unless they are accompanied by a male relative. Men too were forced to grow beards and it was made compulsory for them to attend congregational prayers at mosques. Those who did not show up were considered offenders and were beaten up and even arrested. (Azadi)

Taliban banned secondary education for women claiming that they could not create a ‘safe environment’ for women. Girls can no longer study beyond sixth grade. As per a report:

From 2002 to 2021, 3,816,793 girls enrolled in first through 12th grades. According to the Afghan Ministry of Education’s 2020-2021 annual report, there was 18,765 public and private schools in operation. Afghanistan also had more than 200,000 teachers, including 80,554 women. Over 100,000 Afghan

women were enrolled in public or private universities in 2020 and according to 2019 figures there were 2,439 female lecturers at higher education institutions. Public and private universities flourished in the last two decades, providing women and girls with countless opportunities to contribute to Afghanistan's future. These educational advances fostered broader societal achievements and gains for women. Before the Taliban takeover, 63 women were in the Afghan parliament, nine held minister- or deputy minister-level minister-level positions. Afghanistan's judicial system had 280 women judges and over 500 prosecutors. There were over 2,000 women-owned small and medium-sized businesses. (Ahmadi and Sultan)

It is disheartening to see that the ban on women's education would erase all the progress made in the direction of women's empowerment. With women taken out of medical colleges, the future seems bleak. In the coming years, there will be no female doctors, nurses, or midwives. Women patients are supposed to be treated by female doctors. And women medical students are supposed to be mentored by female doctors only. This segregation and gender discrimination are bound to affect the medical services available to Afghans in the long run. (Parker)

Hosseini depicts this helplessness in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* when Laila is about to give birth. There is a lack of infrastructure in the hospital where she is being taken for the delivery. Laila is subjected to insurmountable pain as she is being operated on for a C-section delivery without anesthetic.

“Tell me what’s going on!” Laila said. She had propped herself up on her elbows.

The doctor took a breath and then told Laila that the hospital had no anesthetic.

“But if we delay you will lose your baby.”

“Then cut me open,” Laila said. She dropped back on the bed and drew up her knees.

“Cut me open and give me my baby.” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 283)

Hosseini has described how healthcare became a luxury during the Taliban reign, back in the 90s and how women were the ones who were hit the most. Things are back to square one since 2021 with Taliban yet again imposing gender discriminating rules when it comes to healthcare in Afghanistan. In this regard, this study becomes

pertinent as what Hosseini portrayed in his books is yet again a grim reality for the people of Afghanistan. In November 2022, fourteen people which included three women were flogged in public for supposed crimes like adultery, robbery, and corruption. This is again reminiscent of the public executions and beatings undertaken by the Taliban during their previous reign. Stating that it was in accordance with the Sharia law, the Taliban conducted public executions and beatings in football stadiums to instill fear in the hearts of people and prevent them for any kind of dissent against them. (Wallen) One can at once picture the scene depicted by Hosseini in *The Kite Runner* wherein a man and a woman are beaten to death in a football stadium.

“Every sinner must be punished in a manner befitting his sin!” the cleric repeated into the mike, lowering his voice, enunciating each word slowly, dramatically. “And what manner of punishment, brothers, and sisters, befits the adulterer? How shall we punish those who dishonour the sanctity of marriage? How shall we deal with those who spit in the face of God? How shall we answer those who throw stones at the windows of God’s house? WE SHALL THROW THE STONES BACK!” (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 236)

In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Hosseini described how Afghans were living in abject poverty. Economic instability was so widespread that people had to resort to giving away their children as they were not in a position to feed them. In *And the Mountains Echoed* we are introduced to fictional characters Saboor and his children Pari and Abdullah who though fictional lend a real picture of the erstwhile Afghanistan. They represent those poor people of Afghanistan, who are struggling to make ends meet. It is infuriating to gauge that what Hosseini showed through his characters was not far from the reality of Afghan people. And moreover, after twenty years the people of Afghanistan are yet again faced with the same sad reality. As a report by Amnesty cites, owing to the Taliban takeover of 2021, followed by the international isolation and economic plunge, Afghanistan has been facing an economic crisis. As per the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 97% of Afghans were living in poverty which went up from 47% in 2020. To survive, families had to resort to child marriages and selling organs. Moreover, to make things worse there has been an exodus of doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, government officials further

hampering the social and economic set-up. (Amnesty International, “Everything You Need to Know about Human Rights in Afghanistan 2020”)

In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini has brought to light the ethnic discrimination that was prevalent in Afghanistan. Through his characters, he highlighted the plight of the Hazaras and how they were marginalized and made subalterns. Hassan who is a Hazara is jeered at and he is forever considered a lowly servant. Despite him being friends with Amir, he is never considered at par with the elite Pashtuns. In 1998, more than 8,000 Hazaras were killed in a massacre planned by the Taliban. We are made privy to this fact in *The Kite Runner* as well:

I had heard about the Hazara massacre in Mazar-i-Sharif in the papers. It had happened just after the Taliban took over Mazar, one of the last cities to fall... “Door-to-door. We only rested for food and prayer,” the Talib said... “We left the bodies in the streets, and if their families tried to sneak out to drag them back into their homes, we’d shoot them too. We left them in the street for days. We left them for the dogs. Dog meat for dogs.” (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 243)

Years after this inhuman deed, when Taliban came back to power in 2021, Hazaras were yet again targeted and killed through unlawful ways. In June 2022, six Hazaras were executed on purpose and it included a twelve-year-old girl. (Amnesty International, “Afghanistan: Taliban Torture and Execute Hazaras in Targeted Attack – New Investigation”) The systemic persecution of Hazara minority continues and it poses a threat to this community which has been rendered subaltern.

It is said that the truth is stranger than fiction. But in this case truth and fiction almost coincide and one is left wondering about the future of Afghanistan. Hosseini himself has expressed his concern and is dismayed at the turn of events that led to the return of Taliban. He looks at them with disbelief and worries about the people of Afghanistan:

Maybe the Taliban has noticed the country it has conquered in 2021 is not the one it decamped from in 2001- nor is the quiet pre-Soviet era Afghanistan I grew up in where women wore short skirts, hippies lounged in tea-houses and you could drive across Kabul in minutes unencumbered by check-points or

barricades fortified with concertina wire. Still, while the Taliban was busy launching RPGs at police cadets, the country was transforming. Over the last twenty years, Afghanistan formed a robust base of educated urban professionals. Young Afghans, male and female went to school and learned to code. They became software engineers and programmers...by 2020, more than 9.5 million children were enrolled in school, 39 percent of them girls-compared with only 90,0000, in 2001, overwhelmingly boys. Young women entered the workforce to help rebuild a country that Taliban left decimated and bankrupt...but perhaps in these 20 years, the Taliban changed as well..after all it is one thing to conquer a nation but a whole other matter to govern it. (Hosseini, "Perspective | Afghanistan Is Not the Country the Taliban Last Ruled. Will That Matter?")

Hosseini was thus apprehensive of the current reign of the Taliban. He indulges in wishful thinking and hopes that perhaps the Taliban would realize that nation-building is only possible if both men and women are equal participants in the economic growth of a country. But, as per a report by World Bank, the Afghan economy shrank by 25 percent in the last two years. Despite everything one in two Afghans remains poor. And with the restrictive policies when it comes to women's education and employment further downfall is expected to be in the offing. (The World Bank)

The current study becomes of utmost relevance with these developments as Khaled Hosseini is credited as someone who brought Afghanistan to the forefront thereby showing the human face of a war-ravaged country. His books portray the grim realities of Afghan people over the years and the subaltern nature of the people reeling under despotic reign of the Taliban. The study delves into the travesties of these characters amidst the backdrop of militancy and highlights subalternity and patriarchy. Under the current volatile scenario in Afghanistan the research in hand thus becomes pivotal.

5.2 Analysis and Critique of Subaltern Studies

Subaltern Studies which form the theoretical framework of the research has been critiqued for varied reasons. While analyzing and employing the valid arguments from the Subaltern theorists it is also imperative to keep a keen eye on the said pitfalls of

the subaltern studies. This would enable one to maintain objectivity and not fall into a lopsided understanding of the study. One of the prime criticisms faced by the Subaltern Studies is that it revolves around binaries. There has been a simplification of class dichotomies. Theorist David Ludden has asserted the problem saying:

First and foremost, the new substance of subalternity emerged only on the underside of a rigid theoretical barrier between 'elite' and 'subaltern,' which resembles a concrete slab separating upper and lower space into a two-storey building. This hard dichotomy alienated from social histories that include more than two storeys or which move among them. (Ludden 16)

The Subaltern studies were formed with respect to events in the Indian subcontinent. But the theory can very well be employed in other social milieus. The 'hard dichotomy' which is at the core of the studies often makes it less fluid especially when putting it into different social frameworks. In the current study at hand, we have engaged the study in the context of the Afghan political and social environment. While the notion of subalternity can very well be put into the Afghan milieu, subalterns are not just those who are colonized by a foreign power but also those who are marginalized and pushed towards fringes by their own people. The concept of subaltern has gone through major transitions since Gramsci coined the word. But the core phenomenon remains the same.

Gramsci strived to dismantle certain set beliefs towards the subaltern groups and focussed on literature that presented subalterns in 'passive, humble, or subordinated positions'. Gramsci believed that it was challenging but not impossible to draw a histography of the subaltern class. He also put forth the idea that subaltern classes are faced with contemporary political, social, cultural, and economic conditions which in turn determine their marginality. He strongly believed that it was possible to alter their marginalized status and felt that subalterns themselves could change their stature. His ultimate goal was to make this change and he devised policies the achieve this goal. (Green) In this regard however, despite varied criticisms, it is evident that the primary goal of both Gramsci and the Subaltern Studies Group was to start a dialogue about these neglected groups of people with less or no autonomy. And it has served this purpose as it came to become an integral and inseparable part of Post-

Colonial Studies. In the current research, it has been deduced that Hosseini's novels have multiple subaltern characters. Though fictional, they are inspired by the people of Afghanistan who faced insurmountable difficulties in a volatile country engaged in strife and wrought with endless wars. 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 stigmatized owing to their ethnicity. Gender subalternity was also a grave issue in Afghanistan. Women were pushed behind veils and treated unfairly while the hegemonic powers robbed them of their rights. The subaltern theory could help one gauge the complexities of the condition of the people of Afghanistan and create a conversation around the injustice meted out to them. In this regard Subaltern theory as a theoretical framework aided in moving the research forward. Moreover, after the recent upheaval that came about in Afghanistan in August 2021, which led to the Taliban coming into power yet again, it has become pivotal to talk about the plight of the people of Afghanistan. Subaltern theories help make sense of the situation and also facilitate in probably offering solutions by understanding the core problem.

5.3 Criticism of Hosseini through the lens of Neo-Orientalism

While exploring the underlying theme of atonement and tracing the undercurrents of subaltern ethos, the term orientalism was touched upon as well. Edward Said's *Orientalism* brought forth the idea of the Western world patronizing Eastern and Asian societies. The Western world while conversing about the East, maintains a prejudiced and elitist attitude towards them. Said had looked down upon this aspect of the Western world wherein they presented themselves as those who were superior and came up with a stereotypical depiction of the East. Said argues that the West during their colonial discourse presents the Orient as 'Other.' In the Journal article, *Orientalism: The Making of the Other*, it is stated:

Orientalism is a built-in system or method by which the West not only socially constructed and actually produced the Orient, but controlled and managed it through a hegemony of power relations, working through the tropes, images, and representations of literature, art, visual media, film, and travel writing, among other aspects of cultural and political appropriation. (Burney)

A new branch of Orientalism stemmed post the 9/11 attacks which came to be known as Neo-Orientalism. It drew most of its features from its precursor helmed by Said. Yet, it had a more pervasive approach. In the book, *Globalizing American Studies*, Neo-Orientalism is defined as:

Although the term “neo-Orientalism” designates a shift in the discourse of Orientalism that represents a distinct, and in ways novel formation, it nonetheless entails certain discursive repetitions of and conceptual continuities with its precursor. Neo-Orientalism is monolithic, totalizing, reliant on a binary logic, and, based on an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the Oriental other. Neo-Orientalism should be understood as a supplement to enduring modes of Orientalist representation. (Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar 283–89)

Khaled Hosseini is an exile writer who migrated from his homeland Afghanistan quite early. He thereafter got educated in the US and practiced medicine before he finally wrote his first book. Having lived most of his life away from Afghanistan, Hosseini has not observed the mayhem on the Afghan land, firsthand. He identifies himself as an American citizen. Yet he could not help but be moved by the atrocities faced by his countrymen back in Afghanistan. Though he is someone who has been far removed from his homeland and has grown up in a different cultural and social environment, Hosseini has made an earnest attempt to bring to light the plight of the Afghan people. However he is often critiqued for showcasing a Western-centric view of Afghanistan in his novels. He is accused of being a prey to Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism in his portrayal of Afghanistan. The research paper titled, *‘Does Hosseini Portray Western Centric View of Afghanistan in His Novels,’* accuses Hosseini of indulging in stereotyping of the East. It also states how Hosseini has delineated an image of Afghanistan which has violence writ in its DNA. It leads one to believe that the people of Afghanistan are belligerent people who know nothing but violence. Statements uttered by his characters like, “Fariba, all these people know is war...they learned to walk with a milk bottle in one hand and a gun in the other.” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid*

Suns 173) make one picture a country of hooligans who have nothing to do with cultural and economic development.

Other than that, Hosseini is also held responsible for showcasing America as a saviour in his novels. More often than not it is said that he depicts America and the West as a haven and as a refuge for his characters who are battling violence in Afghanistan. Various characters in his novels, be it Amir and Baba from *The Kite Runner* or Nila and Pari from *And the Mountains Echoed*- all seek refuge in the West. It is implied that the West is the calming force that gives them a home and a civilized sojourn.

Thirdly, Hosseini is accused of being biased in his representation of Afghanistan. It is claimed that Hosseini's novels draw an image of Afghanistan that is culturally stagnant and needs the leadership and assistance of rich Western countries like America to sustain. The paper also says that though Hosseini vividly narrates the horrors of war and violence in Afghanistan, he does not touch upon talking about an Afghanistan that was rich in culture. There was a time when women saw great progression and women in Afghanistan were accorded the right to vote in 1919 itself- a year before women could vote in America. The researchers thus claim that Hosseini chose to highlight the severe oppression and patriarchy prevalent in Afghanistan but he neglected the other side of Afghanistan, thereby giving a lopsided purview of the country. Women are shown to be suffering and are utterly helpless in the patriarchal Afghan society. (Rehana)

The article titled, *200 Years of Orientalism: From Mary Shelley to Khaled Hosseini* also critiques Khaled Hosseini for leaning toward Oriental tendencies in his novels. The author says that though his depiction of the plight of Afghan women may not be entirely fictionalized, he implied America as a saviour who saved Afghan men and women from the vile characters like Rashid in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Assef in *The Kite Runner*. The author also states vehemently that 'the suffering that Hosseini's characters- especially the Afghan women- go through serves a purpose in the narratives.' While it is essential to highlight and start a dialogue about violence against women, one

cannot use it to justify Western intervention of any kind. The author then emphasizes how the idea of a 'single story'- as famously mentioned by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her Ted Talk- is dangerous. It is pertinent to know the various viewpoints as it appears through Hosseini's works that the West offered refuge and relief to the poor Afghan citizens. There is this singular narrative that shines through most of his works. (Aboelela)

The paper titled, 'Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a Child Rescue and Neo-Orientalist Narrative' also emphasizes how though Hosseini paints an almost authentic picture of the ordeals of women and children of Afghanistan, he remains reticent about the role of West. It appears through his depiction that he is almost justifying the foreign involvement in Afghanistan and projecting it as a saviour of the East thereby initiating a Neo-Orientalist approach. (Al-Dagamseh et al.)

Thus, despite his books receiving acclaim and resounding success, Hosseini is critiqued for leaning towards Orientalism many a time. It is important to be cognizant of various aspects of a writer's work so that the research does not become biased and lopsided.

5.4 Khaled Hosseini as a Writer Who Writes About Human Condition

It is important to analyze differing viewpoints about a work of literature. As discussed above, one can gauge that Hosseini has been both loved and critiqued despite his books selling millions of copies. Herein after an in-depth study of the backlash aimed at Hosseini, the researcher would present her viewpoint. One cannot deny the fact that Khaled Hosseini brought Afghanistan to the forefront after it was looked at with dubious eyes after the 9/11 attacks. The Eastern countries have been looked at by the West as backward and still reeling in the dark ages. It is partly owing to the imperialistic attitude and an inherent air of superiority. But there is more to these countries than the social evils and patriarchy that the West portrays and looks mercifully at. Khaled Hosseini is an exile writer who left Afghanistan at a young age. He claims to have been suffering from 'survivor's guilt' as while his fellow Afghans were suffering through the violence meted out to them all due to external conquests and civil wars, he was away safe and sound in a foreign land. Yet Hosseini always felt

a deep connection with his homeland and thus he wrote books set in Afghanistan. While Hosseini's books run through the backdrop of the Afghan political and social environment, they are primarily tracing human relationships and familial bonds. He has mentioned the same in one of his interviews when asked about how he feels when he is labeled as a writer writing for a Western audience:

I don't write for any audience I write for myself...if I work with the idea of writing for a specific audience then the process becomes an agenda. And then there will be this corrupting presence in the room. I don't write for the people of Afghanistan- it is not for me to tell them about what is happening there...on the contrary, I am educated by them. I don't write for a Western audience though I have a lot of readers in the US. But I don't want to be seen as the West's window into Afghanistan. That isn't my intent. I write stories about the human condition. (Nair)

Hosseini also has mentioned time and again that he is a fiction writer who has not resided in Afghanistan since the 1970s and so his perspective is bound to be skewed on occasions. He claims, "I take a leap of imagination in writing about those who have lived through difficult times. (Kellaway)

Another accusation that is put on Hosseini is that he depicted the utter mayhem in Afghanistan quite explicitly while showing the helplessness felt by Afghan women. Moreover, he implied that the women of Afghanistan are lost and their sufferings could only be put to an end by the Western world. Firstly, the atrocities meted out at the Afghan women are not exaggerated by Hosseini. It is crucial to bring to light the violence directed at these women irrespective of who the perpetrator of the violence is. In this regard, one must credit Hosseini for unmasking the face of violence in the war-ravaged Afghan soil. Women are the ones who are the silent sufferers in any war. In Afghanistan, too women were made to go through insurmountable grief. Patriarchy was already entrenched in the society. Civil wars and external aggressions did not make things easier for women. While Hosseini did show that things stabilized once the Taliban was ousted, it is merely a fact as the Sharia law imposed by the Taliban can unanimously be termed as draconian. He did not imply that it was America which came as a saviour of the Afghan women. One can gauge as to how he has portrayed

the women in his novels as resilient. They are conditioned to behave in a certain manner and they endure injustice and violence. Yet Hosseini does not present them as docile rather they are shown as strong women who despite being in dire situations try tooth and nail to break free from the clutches of patriarchy and abuse. One can at once think of Laila and Mariam from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the indomitable courage they display in the face of extreme circumstances. They are not represented as dainty damsels in distress who wait for the West to show up and be their saviours. Instead, Laila makes a run for life while planning to flee Rashid's house. She also instils courage in Mariam who did not have the good fortune of being raised in a normal household. And towards the end, we find Mariam emerge as their saviour who finally ends the systemic chain of abuse. It is much later that the Taliban leaves. In fact, Mariam is being executed by them though she kills Rashid in self-defence. The women in Hosseini's novels are crippled by circumstances but they are never put across as meek and helpless. Hosseini gives us an array of women characters, all belonging to different familial and educational backgrounds. In *And the Mountains Echoed*, one is left intrigued by Nila Wahdati. Wahdati who despite living in a country which is patriarchal and orthodox does not suppress her voice. She writes erotic poetry which is her own expression of desire. When she feels suffocated in her homeland where women were not expected to defy the set norms, she moves to Paris. Though being affluent she has more agency than a normal Afghan woman, she is made subaltern owing to her rebellious streak. Even her father is ashamed of her for she does not conform to the Afghan way of morality.

Another criticism hurled at Hosseini's works is that he presents binaries in his novels. The dual metaphor of good and evil is inherent in his books especially in *The Kite Runner*. But if one delves deep, it would be understood that Hosseini's characters are not purely 'good.' Baba may be considered as someone who is on one end of the spectrum as someone representing 'goodness.' Yet he is also flawed. He is a philanthropic but he is guilty of not accepting his own flesh and blood as his legitimate son. Despite being a paragon of virtue, he is afraid of his reputation being tarnished. He shames Amir and does not show him acceptance owing to which Amir longs for paternal love. Amir too is a flawed character who has been cowardly and despite being close to Hassan, never considered him an equal. Hosseini has also been

accused of dehumanizing the people of Afghanistan and focussing entirely on extremism. Yet one can gauge that Hosseini has in fact humanized Afghans and made the world look at them as vulnerable but resilient beings who are merely the victims of aggression. He has brought to light the plight of Afghan population and made the world look at them with a newfound love. Hitherto Afghan was looked at with suspicion, more so after 9/11. Albeit unconsciously, Hosseini aided in drawing the human face of Afghanistan amidst the world at large.

Being an exile writer and as someone who has lived in America for most of his life, it is but natural for the country to be seeped in his writing. But one cannot say that he is biased as he has also criticised America for the recent events wherein the withdrawal of the US troops led to complete pandemonium in Afghanistan. He felt that the withdrawal could have happened in a more responsible manner. He showed displeasure with President Biden for not showing empathy with the Afghan citizens whom he addressed as partners for the last twenty years. He condoned the chaotic withdrawal by the American forces and was worried that the progress Afghan women had made over the last twenty years is ‘up in the air.’ (William)

Apart from this Hosseini has also talked about how women in Afghanistan had agency and rights much before the Soviet conquest. In *And the Mountains Echoed* his character Nila Wahdati elaborates as to how Afghan women were not always bereft of their rights. She lauds King Amanullah for bringing about this radical change in the patriarchal Afghanistan society long before the Russian conquest:

You see, he woke one morning, the king, and proclaimed his plan to reshape the country... into a new and more enlightened nation... his wife, Queen Soraya, appeared barefaced in public...And no more polygamy, he said... from now on, he declared, no man can force you into marriage. And no more bride price, brave women of Afghanistan, and no more child marriage. And here is more: You will all attend school. (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 181)

In all his novels Hosseini has delineated an array of characters who are real and flawed. For this reason, his books have not only touched readers but have also brought visibility to the war-ridden land of Afghanistan.

After a thorough analysis of his novels, it can be concluded that atonement is a common theme in his stories. In fact, the universality of his novels exists in the theme of redemption. Human beings are prone to aberrations of different kinds. Guilt follows and one is more often than not left to yearn for redemption. In *The Kite Runner* only when Amir atones himself is when he finds peace. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Mariam finds atonement through sacrifice and by making her life worthwhile. Laila on the other hand finds it in a higher purpose and for working towards the upliftment of her country. In *And the Mountains Echoed* Nabi atones himself by writing a letter to Pari and hoping that even though it took a lifetime, the brother and sister duo are able to reunite.

The research paper titled, 'Retribution to Redemption: A Momentous Literary Journey,' says that redemption and retribution have been the most prominent themes in literature since the time of Aristotle. The authors state that Shakespeare's works gained widespread acclaim owing to this aspect. Even the novels of Maupassant, Dickens capture this principle. The moral and dramatic side of the stories of retribution and redemption lend them a universal quality which people in general relate to. (Meduri)

Khaled Hosseini's novels though set in the backdrop of Afghan turmoil are essentially stories about human relationships. In *The Kite Runner* he traces the relationship between two friends and half-brothers and the story of a father and son duo. The social political and cultural milieu of Afghanistan play a vital role in pushing the story forward. Yet in the end one can surmise that the novel is about Amir's betrayal and his eventual quest for atonement. It is also the story of a son who yearns for his father's love. Despite Amir being a flawed character one can understand and sympathise with him as he grapples with his inner demons. Hassan who appears to be an epitome of grace does not seem like a larger-than-life character yet as someone the replicas of whom we can see all around us. He is that friend who stands by you and has your back. He is an ally who can see right through you and who always chooses to see the goodness in you. Thus, when he is abused the reader at once is distraught and agitated and can feel the helplessness and anger felt by Amir. The bond that the two boys share is delineated with so much sincerity that when it breaks, one is crestfallen. Amir is guilt-ridden and repents his actions. When he finally faces his demons and

comes back to his homeland, it is as if life has come full circle. In Sohrab he sees Hassan and rescuing him gives him the much-awaited retribution. Human bonding and a hunt for identity are universal themes that stand out in Hosseini's novels. Amir tries to make sense of who he is and who he must be to be in his father's good books. Hassan has yielded to the identity of a Hazara who is destined for servitude. Identity is an assimilation of one's race, religion, ethnicity, economic and social environment. Being a Hazara Hassan has been conditioned in a way that he has conceded to the identity of an individual belonging to an inferior status. He is portrayed as a selfless and naïve boy who realizes that Amir can be mean but he loves Hassan deeply. Hassan's letter and the rescue of his son Sohrab finally lead to Amir's atonement. Hassan's letter acts as a catalyst which makes Amir relive the bond that the two boys shared. It also facilitates Amir's acceptance of his character flaws. It makes him reflect on his past deeds and in turn take responsibility for his actions. This serves as the first step which pushes him to work towards atonement:

I dream that my son will grow up to be a good person, a free person, and an important person. I dream that *lawla* flowers will bloom in the streets of Kabul again and *ruhab* music will play in the samovar houses and kites will fly in the skies. And I dream that someday you will return to Kabul to revisit the land of our childhood. If you do, you will find an old faithful friend waiting for you. (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 191)

When finally, Amir is able to rescue Sohrab and bring him to America with him, he feels a sense of contentment and the dark clouds of guilt gradually dissipate leading to atonement:

“Do you want me to run that kite for you?”

His Adam's apple rose and fell as he swallowed. The wind lifted his hair. I thought I saw him nod.

“For you a thousand times over,” I heard myself say.

Then I turned and ran.

It was only a smile, nothing more. It didn't make everything alright. It didn't make anything alright. Only a smile. A tiny thing. A leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird's flight.

But I'll take it. With open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting.
(Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 323-324)

The theme of atonement is thus a universal theme with which the readers identify. The tender bond of love shared by the two Afghan boys at once touches one's heart. Readers around the world might be far removed from the volatile soil of Afghanistan but the human story of two friends and half-brothers amidst a war-trodden backdrop has a universal appeal to it. The narrative of Amir as a flawed guilt-ridden man, who is looking to redeem himself comes across as a story with which one can greatly identify.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini presents atonement of a different kind which yet again has a universal appeal. Mariam is an illegitimate child who finds herself stuck in a sad marriage with a much older man. Hosseini portrays her as a picture of endurance. She bears the atrocities of her husband for she has been marginalised from the time she was a little girl. She does not know what agency is. Laila is a fearless girl who owing to an unfortunate event finds herself as the second wife of Rashid. Unlike Mariam, she has a rebellious streak. She also has some agency owing to the little education her feminist father could expose her to. The bond of sisterhood that develops between these two women makes it a universal story of triumphing against all odds. Mariam who had hitherto been a demure woman finds herself standing up for Laila. Laila had showered Marim with love and respect. It is something that Mariam had never experienced before. Therefore, when Rashid is about to assault her, Mariam does the unexpected and for the first time in her life reacts to Rasheed's violence. Later when she is executed for the murder of Rasheed, she is not bitter for she feels that by doing so she could give Laila and her kids a second chance. Laila on the other hand grabs the second chance that Mariam gives her with both hands and works for the upliftment of her homeland. The sisterhood and the eventual atonement of the two female protagonists lent this novel a universal appeal.

And the Mountains Echoed is not your usual story but multiple stories woven around the themes of familial love, war and mortality, sacrifice, and atonement. But at the heart of it is the story of the brother and sister duo Pari and Abdullah. When Pari is

taken away by the Wahdatis, Abdullah is crestfallen. Hosseini gives a realistic account of the dichotomy between the classes which forces a desperate father to sell his three-year-old daughter so that his other two children can sustain. Nabi, Wahdatis's driver realizes much later that he was instrumental in the separation of the siblings. He spends decades caring for his invalid master and eventually leaves a letter hoping for atonement. He hopes that though it is possibly too late, Pari and Abdullah may reunite. Nabi's remorse and his bid to atone himself touch the reader. Nabi had no inkling that a small action of his could have such a life-altering impact. An error in judgment that leads to far-reaching consequences- this premise is quite familiar and universal thereby bound to touch the readers.

Hosseini draws characters that are layered and steeped in reality. No character is purely black or white in *And the Mountains Echoed*. And therein lies the beauty of the novel. In the real world, most of us are a blend of good and bad. There is no such thing as perfection. Thus, these flawed characters who yearn to redeem themselves feel mighty relatable. Furthermore, we have two sisters Parwana and Masooma. While Masooma is a beauty who is desired by everyone, Parwana is a plain Jane who feels embittered by being sidelined. When the man whom Parwana secretly loves is also smitten by the beautiful Masooma, Parwana ends up pushing her sister which makes poor Masooma an invalid for life. Parwana is wracked with guilt and spends the following years of her life as a caregiver for her sister. She grapples with a sense of remorse and hopes to atone herself by taking care of Masooma. Hosseini does not portray his characters as evil but attempts to humanize them. They commit unforgivable sins, yet they are not boxed as morally corrupt. Parwana feels sorry for what she did and works towards redeeming herself.

In *And the Mountains Echoed* the theme of atonement is delineated through a potpourri of characters. All the characters hail from varied economic and social backgrounds but their link with Afghanistan becomes a common denominator. He introduces two Afghan-American exiles Timur and Idris who come back to their homeland after a hiatus. Hosseini draws on his own experience of coming back to Afghanistan and feeling disillusioned. As he states in this article about sketching out the character of Idris, "He was a vehicle to describe what its like to be an Afghan in exile, to return to see how divergent my experience was from other Afghans...I felt

like I'd come and that I was a foreigner and that the locals knew it." ("Khaled Hosseini Discusses Unforeseen Consequences") While in Afghanistan Idris bonds with a young girl Roshni who is disfigured by her uncle. Idris promises to help Roshni and arrange for her to get surgery. Yet once he leaves Afghanistan and experiences the luxury of his American abode, he gradually dispels Roshni from his mind. He does not feel happy about it. And years later when Roshni becomes a successful author, Idris meets her, all the while fearing that she would call him out.

Thus, like *The Kite Runner*, while the central theme of *And the Mountains Echoed* may not be atonement, it runs as a pivotal aspect through the multiple stories. If not for Nabi's sense of guilt and his wish to reunite the brother and sister duo, the story would have not reached a catharsis. Pari was a little girl when she was separated from her brother, yet she always felt something amiss in her life. Abdullah on the other hand pines for his sister, and has probably lost all hopes for a reunion. The fable with which Hosseini commences the story is symbolic and is a sort of premonition of what is going to happen to the family. Like Baba Ayub in the story who forgets his beloved son Quais, Abdullah too forgets his sister as he suffers from dementia. Though Pari could not be united with her brother in the true sense of the word, she finds a box that tells her that Abdullah remembered her and loved her deeply even after decades. Nabi in a way finally redeems himself as not only Pari comes to know of her brother and understands what is missing in her life, but she also finds her niece and namesake Pari. In reuniting Pari and Abdullah, Nabi also becomes instrumental in bringing together a lost family. The younger Pari who had always wondered about her namesake, was more than happy to have her aunt by her side while she had to go through the painful process of seeing her father slip into oblivion:

I turn over and watch Pari sleeping soundlessly beside me. Her face is pale in the light. I see Baba in her face- youthful, hopeful Baba, happy, how he used to be- and I know I will always find him whenever I look at Pari. She is my flesh and blood. And soon I will meet her children, and her children's children, and my blood courses through them too. I am not alone. A sudden happiness catches me unawares. I feel it trickling into me, and my eyes go liquid with gratitude and hope. (Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed* 402)

Thus, it is quite evident that atonement is a common trail that runs through all his novels. His protagonists are flawed and at times owing to circumstances or due to their own transgressions, are desperate to atone themselves and find peace. This humane theme makes his works universal which never fail to touch the readers deeply.

5.5 Hosseini as a mouthpiece for Subaltern Characters

The concept of subaltern was initiated by Gramsci for he wanted to represent social groups which were neglected, shunned, and kept away from political activities. He also introduced the concept of cultural hegemony through which he implied that the hegemonic powers dominated the home country and imposed their own beliefs which gradually obliterated the values and beliefs of the home country. The Subaltern Studies Group took the concept of the subaltern and employed it in the context of South Asia. It went on to become a significant offshoot of the post-colonial studies. Though Gramsci had intended the term to be assigned primarily to peasants and working class, gradually the connotation of the term broadened. It is also argued that Gramsci's use of the term 'subaltern' may have more than one assumption. In the research paper, 'Refiguring the Subaltern,' it is discussed how Gramsci established subalterns as 'irrepressible,' 'hegemonic' and 'citizen.' While Spivak depicted subalterns as those who cannot speak, Gramsci had presented them as those who were forthright about their ideas but were not acknowledged or understood by the hegemony. The researcher puts across the fact that the intent of the Subaltern Studies Group was to carry forward the notion of subaltern to the present and not limit its meaning to a past phenomenon. They understood that it had the potential to be applied in analysing the socio-cultural conditions of not just the South-Asian societies but can be put to use in a global scenario. (Thomas)

It was much later that the concept was analysed by the likes of Spivak, who studied it through a larger lens and made it a vital concept of post-colonialism. Through the thorough analysis of Gramsci's notion of subaltern and the fluid notion of subalternity ascertained over the years by the Subaltern Studies Group scholars, it has been understood that the concept of subaltern has the potential to be put into a global framework. With this respect, it has been studied in the context of Afghanistan and more specifically through the Afghan characters of Khaled Hosseini's works.

It has been established that in all his novels, namely *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, Khaled Hosseini has portrayed subaltern characters. It is not an exaggeration to say that Hosseini is a mouthpiece of these subaltern characters. He has explored subalternity in varied dimensions. In *The Kite Runner* he has strived to become the voice of subalterns who were discriminated owing to their race. One can feel the plight of Hassan who on account of his Hazara ethnicity is doomed to serve the rich racially superior upper class. He tolerates perpetual racial slurs and even sexual assault without uttering a word as he is devoid of an agency. Hassan's father Ali too has suffered the same fate. His wife formed an illicit relationship with Baba which resulted in the birth of Hassan. Baba was ridden with guilt but as he belonged to a privileged class, he could get away with it. Later Hassan's son Sohrab is met with the same sad fate that was destined for their lot. His parents are killed by the Talib militants and he finds himself living a deplorable life in a dilapidated orphanage. His misfortune does not end here and he is ridiculed and molested by Assef- the same guy who years ago had tortured his father, Hassan. Though Hosseini gives this novel a sort of happy ending wherein Amir atones himself and saves his nephew Sohrab from the clutches of racism and exploitation, one can gauge the grim reality that the subalterns faced in erstwhile Afghanistan. He presents the subalterns in *The Kite Runner* as passive and as those who have accepted their marginalized status. By portraying these characters in a fictional narrative Hosseini took the first step towards laying bare amidst the world the frightful reality of these marginalised people.

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 *The Kite Runner* he depicts the subalterns as submissive and as those who have been so conditioned to serve and stay in the fringes that they have grown a silent acceptance. But 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. Mariam appears as a meek character throughout the book. Yet when she forms the bond of sisterhood with Laila, she stands up against Rasheed and does the unthinkable. Though she sacrifices her life to save Laila, she is at peace for having made a

difference and for finally standing up against someone who tortured her for years. Laila is shown from the start as a rebel owing to her upbringing and education. Stuck in adverse circumstances she suffers too. But she speaks against her patriarchal husband and becomes Mariam's refuge. The Western world had hitherto assumed that the women of middle eastern countries who lived under the shadow of patriarchy, were meek and powerless. 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. Nila is nothing like Mariam or Laila from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. She has lived a life of luxury and is well-educated. Yet, she too is judged by people at large for her life choices. She is labelled and ridiculed for penning poetry about love, sex, and female desire. It is much later, when she is in France that her undeniable talent is acknowledged and she is praised for her literary prowess. In Afghanistan there seemed to be no place for women who have a bold voice and who do not tag along the lines set by age-old patriarchy. By speaking through Nila, Hosseini vocalizes and gives space to women who are independent and who were not ok with the prevalent misogyny. It is indeed deplorable that though Nila finds herself a prey to misogyny in the 1950s, even today women in Afghanistan are looked down upon and have been robbed of basic rights after the advent of the Taliban in 2021. In the same novel, Hosseini has represented the LGBTQ+ community as well when he captures the helplessness of Suleiman. Though Suleiman is a rich privileged man, he leads a life of lie and is never able to come out to the world about his sexuality. He is a subaltern too as he belongs to the marginalized community of people who must live a life of deceit and hide from the world their true selves. In this regard Hosseini's portrayal of subaltern characters from a wide spectrum becomes quite pertinent as it helps shake up the existing framework in Afghanistan which veers towards discrimination and prejudice.

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PUBLICATIONS



Love amidst War: Bonds of Love in Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*

Abrar Ahmed & Meha Sharma

Abstract

Khaled Hosseini is a prominent Afghan American writer who is known for bringing the travesties of his homeland to the forefront through his sensitive portrayal of Afghanistan. Hosseini rose to fame with the publication of his first book *The Kite Runner* in 2003. In 2007 his second book *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released which like his first book was also set in the battered milieu of Afghanistan. His third novel was called *And the Mountains Echoed* and it was published in 2013. *And the Mountains Echoed* was summarized by Hosseini as a 'fairy-tale turned on its head.' It is a multi-generational saga that encompasses decades, with characters spreading over Afghanistan, France, and Greece. The heart of the book though lies in capturing the tumultuous land of Afghanistan and its people within their homeland and as immigrants grappling for a footing in foreign lands. It is observed that amidst all, a single emotion that stands out is the element of love, be it filial love or love in its myriad manifestations. Love becomes an enduring force in this novel which propels the characters through the strife and the uncertainties of their war-ravaged land. This paper aims to analyze the varied concepts of love in the novel *And the Mountains Echoed*. It will also make an earnest attempt to trace how love as an expression helps the characters waddle through the murky waters of subjugation in their homeland as well as battle alienation as exiles. The paper will also examine the varied kinds of love that is eros, philia, agape, and storge in the context of the novel and trace how the characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* veer towards holding the reins of the many kinds of love and forge through the journey called life.

Keywords: Alienation; Exile; Homeland Immigrant; Love.

Introduction

Love is a universal phenomenon that leaves an indelible effect on people and the kind of lives they lead. In literature love is a theme that has more often than not permeated into the very fabric of human relationships. It is an abiding force that propels the multitudes of characters and a keen insight would delineate the fact that no one remains oblivious to the many manifestations of love. Francis Bacon in his essay *Of Love* states, "The stage is more beholding to love, than the life of man. For as to the stage, love is ever a matter of comedies, and now and then of tragedies; but in life, it doth much mischief; sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury." (Bacon 42). Francis Bacon suggests that love is depicted rather unrealistically in plays and it fringes towards romanticism when it comes to the portrayal of the sheer concept of love. Moreover, he infers that love seldom leads to happiness and it is a road wrought with suffering. But whether it abounds you in immeasurable joy or wrecks you one cannot overlook the significance of love as an emotion in human relationships. Over the years philosophers have propounded many theories attempting to understand the kinds of love that human beings experience and how it affects their lives. Literature brims with stories in which love as an emotion often takes centre-stage and helps shape the lives of the many characters. One such book that depicts a realistic portrayal of love amidst war and subjugation is *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini.

Khaled Hosseini is a prominent Afghan American writer who is unarguably credited for not only bringing the travesties of his homeland Afghanistan to the forefront but for also debunking the myths that loomed large over the Afghan soil post 9/11. Often heralded as a publishing phenomenon of sorts, Hosseini rose to fame with the publication of his first book *The Kite Runner* in 2003. In 2007 his second book *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released which like his first book was also set in the battered milieu of Afghanistan. His third novel was called *And the Mountains Echoed* and it was published in 2013. *And the Mountains Echoed* was summarized by Hosseini as- "The book is kind of like a fairy-tale 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" (Hoby). Though not as structured as his previous two novels, *And the Mountains Echoed* remains his most ambitious project which crosses continents and not only portrays the terrible fates of Afghan citizens but also touches upon the refugee crisis, the expatriate experience, and lastly, the rehabilitation work done by doctors and nurses from around the world

to bring stability in Afghanistan. In this regard, *And the Mountains Echoed* has a much broader spectrum. Love is a force that propels the actions of the varied characters etched out by Hosseini in this novel. The stories that brim with grief, remorse, and a yearning for atonement stem from the universal emotion that is love. While waddling through the curveballs that life throws at them, love becomes a redeeming force for the myriads of characters in *And the Mountains Echoed*. This paper will make an earnest attempt to analyze how the different kinds of love present in the book help the characters forge ahead through the battered milieu of the war-stricken land of Afghanistan.

And the Mountains Echoed: Web of Relationships Tied by Love

And the Mountains Echoed like Hosseini's other books is also woven around familial relationships. But the structure is remarkably different as in *And the Mountains Echoed* Hosseini presents in a rather unstructured manner much in a short story-like format, interconnected stories of love, grief, despair, and sacrifice. At the core of it, one may see it as an enduring tale of love between the siblings Pari and Abdullah, but as we traverse through the varied timelines in a land wrecked by subjugation, we come across an array of characters. These characters cross generations and continents yet the one common denominator in them all is the bond of love in its varied shades that make them trudge along the crests and troughs of life.

The story begins as Saboor in a distant Afghan village called Shadbagh narrates a folk-tale to his children Abdullah and Pari. The tale symbolizes filial love and sacrifice and at once puts us in the thick of the arid Afghan land. The story that takes centre stage is the story that depicts the immense love and unfortunate separation of the two siblings Pari and Abdullah. Crippled with penury, Saboor gives away his daughter Pari to the affluent Wahdatis at the behest of his brother-in-law Nabi. Thus, Hosseini establishes early on that love more often than not is closely akin to sacrifice and sorrow. Saboor appeared as steady as a rock as he bid adieu to his little girl for, he knew she would be better off with the rich Wahdatis. Yet this act of sacrificial love numbed him and he was a changed man. Abdullah too was aware of his father's plight.

"Sometimes, in unguarded moments, he caught Father's face clouding over, drawn into confusing shades of emotion. Father looked diminished to him now, stripped of something essential." (Hosseini 47)

Hosseini weaves a web of interconnected characters and we are made

privity to the lives of Suleiman Wahdati and his wife Nila Wahdati. Nabi, Saboor's brother-in-law who facilitates Pari's adoption is the fulcrum of the saga. There is a nod to same-sex love too though unrequited through Suleiman and Nabi. There is also the platonic love between Dr. Markos a Greek Plastic Surgeon and Thalia. Strong and steady despite her horrific past and disfigured face, Thalia is loved by Markos almost as his sister. Parwana and Masooma are sisters and their story of envy has also undercurrents of love and guilt. Then there is also the story of the brothers Timur and Idris who like all immigrants come back to their homeland and yearn to make a difference in the lives of the people who are left shattered owing to the aftermaths of perpetual conquests. Idris who is a doctor is deeply moved by the story of Roshi who he meets through a foreign aid worker in Afghanistan called Amra. Hosseini here depicts the expatriate experience as well as the selfless love that foreign aid workers, doctors, and nurses showed in Afghanistan which was still reeling under the effects of war and turbulence.

The novel is thus an amalgamation of stories tied together by a thread of love. Hosseini states about the book:

I think at the core, all three of my books have been love stories – and they haven't been traditional love stories in the sense that a romantic love story between a man and a woman, you know, they've been stories of love between characters where you would not expect love to be found. So, it is always these intense relationships that form under unexpected circumstances. (NPR)

Kinds of Love and their Manifestations in *And the Mountains Echoed*

The word 'love' can have different connotations. It is a multifaceted concept which can be accorded different meanings in different situations. A similar thought is delineated in the research paper, *Philosophy of love*:

The words, "I love you," take on very different meanings when said to a spouse, to a parent, or to a friend. While the English language appointed only one word to the multifaceted concept of "love," the Greeks invented three words for it: "eros," "philia," and "agape." It comes as little surprise that philosophers across time have debated which the highest form of love is. (Perlman)

C.S. Lewis in his book, *The Four Loves* attempted to establish that love can be characterized into four types. The one prominent theme of *And the*

Mountains Echoed as already discussed is love amidst the terror embroiled land of Afghanistan. Sorrow is more often than not an offshoot of love in *And the Mountains Echoed* and yet love is a perennial force that binds the stories together. Nabi one of the prime characters in the book echoes this thought when he says, "I know now that some people feel unhappiness the way others love, privately, intensely, and without recourse." (Hosseini 130). Herein it is interesting to gauge as to what extent the varied relationships as depicted in *And the Mountains Echoed* fall under the categories of love as laid out by the Greeks and then further analysed by the British writer C.S. Lewis in the aforementioned book *The Four Loves*. (Lewis)

Lewis maintained that there are four kinds of love, namely affection, friendship, eros and charity. (Lewis)

Storge/Affection

Storge or Affection is the love that exists between a parent and a child and vice-versa. Lewis puts across a vivid imagery in our minds to understand affection as a form of love. He says, "The image we must start with is that of a mother nursing a baby, a bitch or a cat with a basketful of puppies or kittens; all in a squeaking, nuzzling heap together; punings, lickings, baby-talk, milk, warmth, the smell of young life." (Lewis 53-54). Though affection is deemed as a pure kind of love, Lewis points out that it is something which is expected out of a person. One is expected to love his/her child and the child in turn feels entitled to the love irrespective of anything. It is evident when he says, "But Affection is often assumed to be provided, readymade., by nature; "built-in," "laid-on," "on the house. We have a right to expect it. If the others do not give it, they are "unnatural." This assumption is no doubt the distortion of a truth. Much has been "built-in." Because we are a mammalian species, instinct will provide at least some degree, often a high one, of maternal love. Because we are a social species familiar association provides a milieu in which, if all goes well, Affection will arise and grow strong without demanding any very shining qualities in its objects. If it is given us, it will not necessarily be given us on our merits. Yet affection is the humblest form of love as it "gives itself no airs." (Lewis 55). Therefore, affection is deemed as a feeling which is intrinsically present in humans and animals.

Storge/Affection in *And the Mountains Echoed*

Pari and Abdullah: Pari and Abdullah's relationship is the focal point of the book and like a spool of thread other characters stem out of these two

pivotal characters. It is the undying love and the consequent separation around which the book is centred. Affection as a category of love as mentioned above translates into filial love. But here Abdullah was not just a brother but also a father-figure in Pari's life. He had slipped into the role of a parent early on:

"He was the one raising her. It was true. Even though he was still a child himself. Ten years old. When Pari was an infant, it was he she had awakened at night with the squeaks and mutters, he who walked and bounce her in the dark. He had changed her spoiled diapers. He had been the one to give Pari her baths.... He loved the fact that he was the one to help with his first step, to gasp at her first uttered word. This was his purpose, he believed, the reason God had made him, so he would be there to take care of Pari when He took away their mother." (Hosseini 31)

It was a reciprocal love wherein Pari too responded to Abdullah's love whole-heartedly. The pure and unadulterated love between the duo is evident in the following conversation:

"Abollah?"

"Yes."

"When I grow up, will I live with you?"

"If you want. But you won't want to."

"Yes, I will!"

"You'll want a house of your own."

"But we can be neighbours."

"Maybe."

"You won't live far."

"What if you get sick of me?"

"I wouldn't!"

Abdullah grinned to himself. "All right, fine."

"You'll be close by."

"Yes."

"Until we're old."

"Very Old."

"For always."

"Yes, for always."

From the front of the wagon, she turned to look at him. "Do you promise, Abollah?"

"For always and always." (Hosseini 25-26)

There was a tenderness in the love which the siblings had which made this fall into the category of affection. And it is this enduring force which stays despite separation, distance, and time. From Afghanistan to France to USA, the siblings spend years apart yet there was a longing which lurked at some corner of their hearts.

Baba Ayub and Qais: The novel commences with the story of Baba Ayub and his beloved son Qais. Hosseini put this story within the story to convey the larger theme of the book, that is how love leads to pain and sacrifice. Here Baba Ayub hands over his child to a *div* for the larger good of the village. Though when he realizes that his son Qais is much happier staying on an enchanted land away from the penury-stricken village of Maidan Sabz, he sacrifices his love for his most loved child with the *div*. His heart still pines for him but his parental love makes him see what was best for his child.

"You are a good father, the *div* said, as Baba Ayub passed him by." (Hosseini 12).

This is an example of storge which is crucial as it lays the groundwork for the varied characters that are to be depicted in *And the Mountains Echoed* each stuck in a quagmire of love and suffering.

Philia/Friendship

Philia or friendship is the kind of love that one has for his/her friends. Lewis puts forth the argument that, "Friendship is the least biological of our loves. Both the individual and the community can survive without it" (Lewis 94). But having said that he goes on to establish that Philia or Friendship remains an integral element of love which help the society thrive. He elucidates the significance of Philia furthermore by the following argument:

Every civilised religion began in a small group of friends. Mathematics effectively began when a few Greek friends got together to talk about numbers and lines and angles. What is now the Royal Society was originally a few gentlemen meeting in their spare time to discuss things which they (and not many others) had a

fancy for. What we now call “the Romantic Movement” once was Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Coleridge talking incessantly (at least Mr. Coleridge was) about a secret vision of their own.” (Lewis 100).

Therefore, Philia though not biological in nature is a form of love which is instrumental in strengthening human relationships and aiding them through rough patches. Professor Lee Perlman vehemently argues in one of his research papers as to how Philia is the highest form of love:

My view is that philia is the highest form of love, for three reasons. Firstly, unlike erotic and agapic love, philic love treats the beloved not as an object with qualities, but as an actual human being with an essence. Secondly, whereas erotic love and agapic love are unidirectional, philic love is a two-way street that requires the mutual participation of both the lover and beloved. Lastly and most importantly, philia is a relationship between the consciousness of the lover and beloved (Perlman 1).

Indeed, the relationship one has with his/her friends is of mutual understanding and love. It can never be a one-way street and it involves the equal participation of both the parties. This kind of love thrives on the edifice of respect and camaraderie.

Philia/Friendship in *And the Mountains Echoed*

Markos and Nabi: Markos was a Greek plastic surgeon who was serving in Afghanistan which was reeling under the post-war atrocities. Lewis maintains that friendship is companionship as he says, “Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden)” (Lewis 96). Moreover, two ailing souls too come together to form a friendship while looking to heal themselves in each other’s company. Markos and Nabi with empty crevices in each one’s kind heart, develop a companionship which is heart-warming:

Let me state now what a pleasure it has been to know you over the last seven years, Mr. Markos. As I write this, I think fondly of our yearly ritual of planting tomatoes in the garden, your morning visit to my small quarters for tea and pleasantly, our impromptu trading of Farsi and English lessons. I thank you for your friend-

ship, your thoughtfulness, and for the work that you have undertaken in this country... (Hosseini 74).

The philial love that exists between Markos and Nabi after the post-Taliban era is instrumental in the final reunion of Pari and Abdullah, thereby bringing the story to a bitter sweet culmination.

Eros/Romance

“Eros is what we think of, when we think of “love.” It is what we all want and need, our main worry and source of concern, but when it comes to defining it, we are surprisingly short of apt words. Very tentatively, let’s think of it in terms of the passionate attachment we feel for one special individual, who is seen as beautiful, desirable, and valuable” (Sara 71). Eros is by and large associated with sexual love and is what people generally associate love with. Yet though amorous, eros can also be the kind of love which has the potential to drive a person into extreme acts for the object of his/her affection. It can be a propelling force in human relationships and oft can make or break a person. It can be unrequited love as well which in turn can offer nothing but misery to the person in question.

Eros/Romance in *And the Mountains Echoed*

The most intriguing relationship in the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* has undercurrents of eros love. Nabi, who was the Wahdatis’ driver had a liking for Nila Wahdati, the rebellious poetess. He could not help admire and glance furtive looks at his master’s wife. And what is interesting is that it is this love which had the undertones of eros love which prompts Nabi to propose the idea of Pari’s adoption. In a bid to offer solace to the childless Nila and to impress her, Nabi sets in motion something which forms the very edifice of the novel *And the Mountains Echoed*. His love is visible in these initial descriptions. Glimpses of eros is pretty evident through Nabi’s words wherein he describes his encounters with Nila:

It was then that the front gates opened and a black-haired young woman emerge. She wore sunglasses and a short-sleeved tangerine-coloured dress that fell short of the knees. Her legs were bare, and so were her feet. I did not know whether she had noticed me in the car, and, if she had, she offered no indication. She rested the heel of one foot against the wall behind her and, when she did, the hem of her dress pulled up slightly and thus revealed a bit of the thigh beneath. I felt a burning spread down from my cheeks

to my neck (Hosseini 80).

Agape/Charity

Agape is often referred to as the highest form of love. There are different kinds and degrees of agape. And Lewis makes a valid distinction between them thereby throwing significant insights into agape love:

C.S. Lewis makes the compelling distinction between what he calls Gift-Love and Need-Love, the former being a higher form of love than the latter. An example of Gift-Love is a father who toils to work hard and denies himself pleasure so that he can save enough money for a secure future for his children...an example of Need-Love is a child who falls down, hurts his knee, and runs to his mother for comfort. This is not a selfish act but of mutual love. Gift-Love may be mutual, but on its highest level, it is entirely self-giving for the sake of others. This is agape or what he calls charity. This agape love is more than altruism" (Enright et al.).

Since agape love is unconditional, it is considered as the highest form of love there is. Offering an analogy of a garden, Lewis delineates the concept that agape is akin to the acceptance and the love for God or a higher power (Lewis163).

Agape/Charity in *And the Mountains Echoed*

Markos Varvaris is a Greek plastic surgeon who devotes his life as a rescue worker to treat children in war affected countries. Leaving his own mother behind he serves people in Afghanistan, thereby exhibiting a form of selfless love or agape. Through Dr. Markos Hosseini has attempted to put forth the harsh realities and the aftermaths of war. Markos acts as his mouthpiece who is out in the world to make a difference and offer a helping hand to the ones suffering, sans any vested interest. Though a supporting character Markos is instrumental in reuniting the brother and sister pair of the protagonists Pari and Abdullah. His selfless love and sense of duty towards humankind thus is an important element in the book and draws our attention towards agape being a superior kind of love which the world needs at large.

Conclusion

Khaled Hosseini in *And the Mountains Echoed* echoes the sentiment that

love is an all pervasive and enduring force which can cross continents and traverse through centuries. Though he refrains from drawing out the terrors of war vividly but the consequences of it are present in the travesties faced by the characters. And the theme of love meanders all along which propels the characters to thwart as well as accept the challenges life throws at them time and again. It is interesting as to how we find traces of the different kinds of love be it affection, philia, eros or agape. The varied shades of love add layers to this multi-generational saga and at once the reader is able to feel the helplessness of the characters brought alive by Hosseini.

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Traversing through Memories in Exile: an Analysis of Khaled Hosseini's the Kite Runner

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Abstract

Khaled Hosseini can be heralded as someone who not only brought the battered milieu of his homeland Afghanistan to the forefront but has also been instrumental in debunking the myths surrounding it through his novels. A prominent Afghan American novelist Hosseini migrated to the US at the age of fifteen owing to the political upheavals in Afghanistan. Hosseini and his family were granted political asylum in the US, and he became a trained physician. In 2003, he became a publishing phenomenon of sorts with his book *The Kite Runner*, which earned widespread acclaim. An enduring tale of friendship between Amir and Hassan, the seeds of the book were planted in Hosseini's mind when in 1999, he read about how the Taliban (the militant organization which had taken hold of Afghanistan) had banned the sport of kite-flying. It was one of the many authoritarian rules laid to subjugate people. However, Hosseini, an Afghani living in exile, brought back vivid memories of his childhood, spent flying kites in the alleys of Afghanistan, once his home. It acted as an impetus, making him write the story of two friends and their bonds of amity, which spanned through generations. *The Kite Runner* depicts the war-ravaged Afghani soil right from the fall of the monarchy, the Soviet invasion, and the eventual rise of the Taliban. More often than not, a displaced protagonist yearns to return to his homeland. Memory plays a crucial role in filling the blank spaces that the sense of displacement inevitably creates, alienating one further. The purpose of nostalgia and the urgency to redeem oneself forms the edifice of Hosseini's book *The Kite Runner*. Recounting the trauma of the past and traversing through the subjugated and war-ravaged terrains of his homeland Afghanistan, the protagonist Amir holds on to his threadbare memories only to come home and put an end to his suffering. Though Hosseini claims that *The Kite Runner* is not autobiographical, it is evident that as a writer in exile, his own experiences have still seeped into his debut work. This paper aims to analyze the significance of memory as an inherent aspect of exile literature through a study of Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*. It will also attempt to trace the dilemma that an exile writer portrays through his protagonists by reclaiming the past. As Afghanistan has come to the forefront yet again with the withdrawal of the US forces and the consequent violence that ensued, followed by the reinstatement of the Taliban, it is even more pertinent to examine literature that brings forth the turmoil and travesties of Afghanistan.

Keywords: Exile Writers, Memories, Afghanistan, Taliban, Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*

Introduction

When Salman Rushdie put forth this statement, he spoke out for all exile writers who, more often than not, traverse past and present. Memories form a vital thread that connects the exiled writers to recount and, many times, reclaim what was lost as they were uprooted from their home country.

In 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PPDA) seized power, followed by the Soviet-Afghan war in 1980. The volatile environment in Afghanistan made the Hosseini family seek political asylum in the US in 1980 when Hosseini was fifteen years old. Later, Hosseini became a trained physician and practiced medicine for over ten years in the US. In 2003 he became a publishing phenomenon of sorts with his debut book, *The Kite Runner*, which not only brought the battered milieu of Afghanistan to the forefront but also debunked the several myths that shrouded the subjugated soil of Afghanistan.

Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*, which heralded his presence in the diasporic literary stage, inarguably delineated the dilemma of an exile writer who holds on to the reins of his threadbare memories, thereby coming to terms with his two-fold existence.

Memory: The lever that pushes forth Exile Writing

The seeds of the book *The Kite Runner* were planted in Hosseini's mind when he read about the Taliban banning the sport of kite-flying. Hosseini shared the same in an interview.

"I was watching a news story in the spring of 1999 on television, and this news story was about the Taliban. Moreover, it talked about all the different impositions the Taliban had placed on the Afghan people. Moreover, at some point along the line, it mentioned that they had banned the sport of kite flying, which struck a personal chord for me because, as a boy, I grew up in Kabul with all my cousins and friends flying kites" (RFE/RL).

Though Hosseini maintains that *The Kite Runner* is not autobiographical, one cannot overlook the fact that it was the memory of his childhood days spent in Afghanistan which ceased to be obliterated and thus manifested in the form of a fictional book. Jasbir Jain, in her book, 'The Diaspora Writes Home' proposes, "Memory is both process and raw material;

the process as it covers many journeys back and forth as a new subjectivity is defined, as relationships are reviewed and very often cleansed of bitterness and regret and raw material as it is the only reality that has been experienced either by them or the ancestors that have created them made them what they are. All the cultural nuances so imperceptibly imbibed and internalized and often fretted against are now highlighted and framed through the act of remembrance—an act that is simultaneously a process of self-analysis, self-discovery, and relocation. It is the raw material for no matter how distanced they feel from it, it is the primary baggage they have lugged along the route, the context that provides a meaning" (Jain 9).

This act of remembrance steers forth the voice of an exiled writer as he walks on the long-lost road of remembrance, which had hitherto been buried to give way to his present. This aspect is evident enough in the foreword of *The Kite Runner* wherein Hosseini writes, "In March of 2003...I returned to Kabul for the first time in twenty-seven years. I had left Afghanistan as an eleven-year-old, thin-framed seventh grader; I was going back as a thirty-eight-year-old physician, writer, husband, and father of the two" (Verma 183).

The Kite Runner: Past Remembered and Reclaimed

The Kite Runner captures the enduring tale of friendship between Amir and Hassan. 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. However, an unfortunate act of sexual molestation, Amir's consequent shame, and the fact that he chose not to stand up for his friend Hassan form the edifice on which the novel progresses. The book commences on a note that once affirms how memory percolates and forms the very essence of a protagonist in exile.

I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek.

Years have transpired, but the protagonist Amir invariably traverses to 1975, when he was twelve. The memory of that year is so much in his mind that, like a time warp, it flings him back to his childhood and perches him in his homeland Afghanistan. "These lines become metaphoric at many levels.

The constant swaying of the past and present interspersed with metaphors that act as a bridge between the two distant worlds makes *The Kite Runner* representative of exile literature. More often than not, the lines of fiction and fact are submerged. In Amir, Hosseini seems to transfer the epithet of a man in exile, who, though far removed from his roots, is still entrenched at some corner, waiting to reclaim his past.

The first chapter sets a tone of nostalgia as Amir recounts his life in Afghanistan.

"One-day last summer, my friend Rahim Khan called from Pakistan. He asked me to see him. It was my past of unatoned sins. Then I glanced up and saw a pair of kites, red with long blue tails, soaring in the sky. They danced high above the trees on the west end of the park, over the windmills, floating side by side like a pair of eyes looking down on San Francisco, the city I now call home. Moreover, suddenly Hassan's voice whispered in my head: For you, a thousand times over. Hassan the harelipped kite runner" (Hosseini 1).

In these lines, as Hassan whispers in Amir's head, it is as if his past comes swooping on him a thousand times over. One senses a melancholy, another trait of an exiled character. The protagonist in *The Kite Runner*, in recapturing his past, bears similarity to someone penning his autobiography and mapping his familial roots. As Anna Mäkinen analyses in her research, "Mapping his memories in a project of narrative cartography, Amir simultaneously maps his exilic identity, the expressions of which are both conscious and unconscious in his memoir. In addition to the explicitly narrated escape from one place to

another, exile manifests itself in the memoir implicitly, through recurring metaphors of liminality, movement, and non-linear time” (Mäkinen)

Acknowledgment of the Subaltern

Another aspect that forms an integral part of *The Kite Runner* as a postcolonial subtext of sorts is the delineation of the subaltern. While reclaiming his past, the immigrant writer often retraces the social fabric of his land and, in the process, comes to terms with the class dynamics intrinsic to that period. The edifice of *The Kite Runner* is the guilt that overpowers Amir's subconscious. The gruesome molestation that his friend Hassan endures is, on some level, the consequence of his being a Hazara. Amir's silence gnaws at him, and it is only later, when he scratches the hitherto suppressed memories, that we are made aware of the subtle exploitation and casual acceptance of Amir to treat Hassan, his economically inferior friend, as someone who is bound to servitude.

As Promod K. Nayar points out, “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 Ahmadiyahs in Pakistan, the Dalits in India, the Aborigines in Australia and Canada, or the Hazaras in Afghanistan. Global activism in the domain of Human Rights and investigation of war crimes and ethnicities focus almost entirely on subalternation. In effect, one could argue that the global visibility of the postcolonial subaltern, subalternated by the state, ensure at least minimal pressure on the state towards welfare or reparation” (Nayar 70).

The following lines depict how the class divide worked at the base level, even as the friendship and camaraderie between Amir and Hassan thrived.

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 a Chinese doll face perpetually lit by a hare-lipped smile. Never mind any of those things. Because history is not 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 22).

However, gradually as layers are peeled and Amir narrates his past, it is also hard to miss that a sense of wrong-doing towards Hassan and, in turn, the entire Hazara tribe permeated his psyche. He is not merely a servant representative of the submissive Afghan Hazaras. He is not merely a memory. He is the metaphor for Afghanistan; he is a metaphor for friendship; he is a metaphor for "homeland"; he is a metaphor for memory; he is a metaphor for Amir's existence” (Verma 185).

Hosseini mentions in an interview how he consciously put forth the plight of the Hazaras and the inequality that persisted in Afghanistan: "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 past" (Afghan Magazine).

This acknowledgment of the subaltern tribe of Hazaras by a privileged exile writer is crucial to opening up a dialogue and eventually makes one hope for the winds of change.

Guilt and Homecoming

The initial chapters of the novel chronicle the friendship between Amir and Hassan and Amir's constant yearning for his father's approval; the event that changes the characters' lives is the kite-flying tournament to earn Baba's affection; Amir resolves to win the tournament. On the wrong day of the kite-flying event, the lives of the two boys cease to remain the same. Hassan is molested while trying to protect Amir's prized possession from his nemesis Assef. Amir's silence puts him in the rignmarole of never-ending guilt, which haunts him even when he is a middle-aged man away from his home country.

This nerve-wracking guilt finally brings Amir back to Afghanistan, albeit years later. Traveling through the labyrinths of memory and looking for redemption, Amir becomes the mouthpiece of Hosseini in unfolding the terrors of war-ravaged Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is portrayed as grim through dreadful images as Amir hopes that the sad state of affairs in his homeland is but a dream.

"This had to be a dream. It had to be. Tomorrow morning, I would wake up and peek out the window: No grim-faced Russian soldiers patrolling the sidewalks, no tanks rolling up and down the streets of my city, their turrets swiveling like accusing fingers, no rubble, no curfews, no Russian Army Personnel Carriers weaving the bazaars...This was no dream" (Hosseini 98).

The novel's second part takes place in California, and Hosseini's exile experience invariably seeps in as Baba and Amir find their footing in a foreign land.

A new life beckons Amir in America, and for him, "America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins" (Hosseini 119).

Only years later, through a phone call from Rahim Khan, the past hurls up, staring Amir in the face. Once Amir sets foot in Afghanistan again, memories flash through his eyes of land which once was his home and the home of his loved ones.

"The kinship I felt suddenly for the old land... it surprised me. I had been gone long enough to forget and be forgotten. However, I had not. Moreover, under the bony glow of a half-moon, I sensed Afghanistan humming under my feet. Maybe Afghanistan had not forgotten me either" (Hosseini 211).

Amir goes on to become a writer, and thus again, one can see stark similarities between Hosseini and Amir, both exile writers making sense of their roots through their words. In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini makes the central theme the quest for redemption of a character away from his homeland. Only when the protagonist, Amir,

rescues and brings Hassan's son home he feels that he has purged his sins. The narrative, though fictional, draws extensively on memory while bringing to the fore the war-ravaged state of Afghan land, the atrocities of the militant forces of the Taliban, and symbols that signify the withered fragments of Afghan soil.

Conclusion

Exile writers represent an amalgamation of multiple cultures and, more often than not, depict the fractured milieu of their erstwhile homeland, thereby laying bare an unusual voice of a writer in the diaspora. "Their writings, fiction, and nonfiction, therefore represent a struggle for individual identity, and the expatriate writer as an individual caught in a continuum of regression and progression, dislocation and relocation." They write about the quest for identity, a crisis caused due to frequent 'uprooting' and 're-routing.' Their writings describe "multiculturalism" and "marginalized territory" in spatial terms, highlighting individuals and communities that are displaced and dislocated; while the native homeland becoming a metaphor in their writings" (Ilyas). The 'broken mirror' analogy that Rushdie offers is inherent in Hosseini's works as an exile writer (Rushdie 11). It is most prominent in *The Kite Runner*, wherein the memory of a past foregone not only leads to the atonement of the central character but, in the process, Hosseini revisits Afghanistan laying bare the history of his bruised homeland. The redemption of the protagonist Amir in *The Kite Runner* may also be symbolic of an exile writer's quest to find solace and come to terms with the 'survivor's guilt.' Hosseini remained unscathed in a safe space while his fellow citizens faced turmoil and trauma. To go back and create literature out of shards of memory while depicting the travails of one's homeland brings reaffirmation for a writer in exile. Memory, in this regard, becomes a propelling force and though fragmented, becomes a vital tool for a writer in exile to reclaim his past and tell the story of his homeland.

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