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DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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PATRIARCHY AND GENDER
STEREOTYPING IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S
A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for Master's Degree**

Candidates:

Ms. Siham AZZI

Mr. Youssouf BELKHIRI

Supervisor:

Mr. Bachir SAHED

2019

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DEDICATION

To those who stood by my side...

SIHAM

DEDICATION

To my family and friends...

YOUSOUF

ABBREVIATIONS

ATSS: A Thousand Splendid Suns

ABSTRACT

The nexus between patriarchal ideology and gender roles in the third world continue to agitate scholars and stir conflicted debates within the realm of postcolonial feminism. The present study, therefore, addresses the plight of women in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* amid the overlapping oppressions of hegemonic masculinity as well as cultural and social expectations. Hosseini's narrative exposes decades of violence and deprivation wherein the female subject is constructed as the other. Hence, the primary aim of this study is to demonstrate the powerful impact of social, cultural and political dimensions on the construction of gender roles in the selected corpus. To achieve this aim, the study endeavors to analyze Hosseini's work in the light of Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory of subalternity. The first chapter is devoted to the socio-historical context and the theoretical framework. The second chapter examines how the politics of gender and patriarchy alienate the female body in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It sheds light on the novelist's representation of the subaltern *voice* and the diverse tools of female resistance. In a nutshell, this research highlights the role of ideology in the emergence of gender stereotypes in the Afghan society.

Keywords: patriarchy, gender stereotyping, subalternity, ideology

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INTRODUCTION

Opinions about the respective roles of the two sexes have varied greatly; they were initially devoid of scientific basis and only reflected social myths (De Beauvoir, 2009).

Literature has the power to reflect the profound connection between artistic production and the historical and cultural realities. One can stress the idea that within a literary work lies the force that transports the reader towards the conditions of fellowmen and women in a society. In this regard, feminist postcolonial literature is the threshold of some of the realities which shape the lives of colonized women in the third world, namely their struggle to challenge rigid cultural structures such as patriarchy in order to achieve self-realisation. Literature written during colonial and postcolonial eras replicates women's firm resistance to get equal rights to participate in both social and political life. For instance, girls in particular regions in the third world are exiled from their communities because they are initially excluded from the educational realm. Indeed, it can be quite problematic for women in such politically and socially unstable regions have a proper self-identification since their existence is not even acknowledged.

The Afghan author Khaled Hosseini, whose literary production is placed into the category of storytelling, is considered as a landmark in contemporary third world literature. Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *The Mountains Echoed* (2013) are part-historical fiction, part-social commentary novels which tackle sensitive themes such as gender stereotyping, sexuality, immigration, patriarchy as a social system, colonialism and a verity of other profound subject matters. Nevertheless, the role of women is a central theme in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Hosseini makes his readers witness physical suffering and emotional longings experienced by the female characters; all in what it seems like a lesson in history that unfolds before the readers' eyes. The novelist points out that

among other experiences, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is “about love and it is first and foremost a love story. And those are universal human experiences” (qtd in Stuhr, 23).

Hosseini, as an Afghan author, has written *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to shed light on the plight of women in his country, Afghanistan. Hosseini’s work is described to be extremely compelling and marked by disturbing accounts of suffering which reflects in his narrative. This novel in particular has succeeded in capturing the sentiments of readers and academics alike due to the continuing dehumanization and degradation of women during the long, troubled history of the war-torn Afghanistan. Moreover, within societies deeply penetrated and governed by religious and social codes, discourse is also derived from interpretations promoted by dominant patriarchal hegemonies which often situate women in a weaker position than men (Soraya, 82). For this reason, discussing Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through postcolonial feminist lens will offer a broader understanding about gender stereotyping at the backdrop of overlapping oppression of patriarchy and colonialism in the Afghan society.

A thousand Splendid Suns introduces the diverse life experiences of Mariam and Laila. The heart of this novel is how circumstances, fate and tragedy bring these two women together. Their lives intersect and grow to become very intimate and close due to their shared victim status and their mutual disgust and hatred for Rasheed, the tyrannical husband. The story is about family, longing and acceptance as well as belonging. The background is the upheavals in Afghanistan which in many ways shape the lives of these women. Through his narrative, the author captures an authentic image of Afghanistan and its culture as kaleidoscope constantly changing and evolving. Hence, it can be argued that successive rulers and political powers; namely the Soviets, the Mujahedeen, Taliban regime and finally the controversial American presence in the country brought about a radical shift in the perception of women within the Afghan society. As such, the author’s centre of focus is the

status of the female protagonists as they endure cultural and social exile as well as political marginalization. The intricacy of Mariam, Nana and Laila's life experiences construct them as subalterns condemned to maintain a position of silence and obedience.

The study highlights the impact of cultural, social and political dimensions on the construction of gender roles in the novel. Indeed, the Afghan society has witnessed a wide range of alterations, most of which are reflected in the deteriorating position of women. In addition, women have to act in accordance to a specific set of codes and beliefs deeply rooted in the Afghan community which in many ways contribute to their subalternity. Women's most celebrated role is serving man at home under any circumstance, and he in turn protects her honour and graces her with legitimacy. Furthermore, the female body is forced to bear extra spiritual, religious and social underlying connotations such as the family's reputation. Due to these additional meanings, the female body is rendered an object under the unimaginable pressure of conflicting ideologies. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the powerful impact of patriarchy as a social system on the formation of gender roles in Afghanistan throughout three decades of war. Moreover, the representation of the subaltern voice and women's rebellion in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* will be put under scrutiny.

Postcolonialism and feminism both provide theoretical frameworks for literary criticism and concern themselves with the representation of marginalized, subjugated and oppressed members of society. As explained by Bell Hooks, "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (Hooks, 1). In plain words, feminism does not seek to demonize men by all means; rather Hooks asserts that the understanding of sexism against both genders is crucial to understand feminism and that all sexist thinking or action is the problem whether it is performed by men or women. That being said, feminist literary criticism seeks to address and expose the male dominance in literature (Carter, 91).

However, what sets the postcolonial feminist theory apart from mainstream feminism is that it focuses on the literature produced by third world writers and attempts to establish a literary discipline which is more inclusive and relevant to third world women. This theory came to approach the status of women in the third world while stressing the specificity of their historical, cultural, social, economic and political backgrounds. The intersection of colonialism with gender, sex, class and race in different contexts of women's lives is a millstone in postcolonial feminist studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a prominent postcolonial theorist whose work concentrates on the representation of doubly colonized women as oppressed and marginalized. Spivak therefore encourages the subaltern subject to have a voice and speak up even in the absence of male ears. Hosseini addresses the issue of double colonization in his novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and, in a way, his portrayal of strong female characters struggling to defy oppression can be read as rejection to any attempts to speak on behalf of the subaltern subject.

In the light of this theory, the present research will explore concepts such as 'stereotyping', 'subjugation' and 'subordination' throughout the novel. The latter is full of stereotypical images of third world women oppressed by men as well as the ruling hegemonies. This toxic relationship between the two genders leads to "domination" and paints a horrid picture about the oppressor. In postcolonial feminism, the oppressed is often referred to as "the other". Evidently, the oppressed subject is called 'Subaltern'; a term introduced by Spivak which refers to the oppressed who do not have a voice and cannot be heard. Spivak goes even further to declare that the female subaltern is wing clipped and alienated. Ultimately, the female is given no chance to express her desire as a sovereign subject. In her ground breaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"(1988), Spivak states that "in the context of colonial production and male dominance, the subaltern has no history and

cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadows” (Nelson, Grossberg, 287).

Furthermore, ‘women’s rights’ and ‘gender apartheid’ in Afghanistan continue to generate relentless debates in the West as well as in the rest of the world. The stereotypical Western representation of Afghan women as inferior beings in a patriarchal society that denies them the basic human rights is predominantly the product of naive and simplistic attempts to transpose a set of Western norms and values onto societies with very different culture and history. Such expositions leave much to be desired; although certainly there are more that can be done to improve the situation of women in similar regions not just in Afghanistan. Indeed, this study endeavours to conduct a close examination to the prevalent social and cultural hierarchies in order to unveil the truth about gender stereotyping in the Afghan society.

In fact, Linda L Lindsey underlines that gender is thought of as the premise upon which the lives of men and women are set in society (2-5). In other words, gender roles are confined to a combination of socio-political, cultural and religious thoughts together they set up for the creation of gender stereotyping which deteriorates the roles of both sexes. Basically, the plight of women under similar circumstances is perfectly reflected in Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Certainly, literature has always been a vehicle for change since it gives voice to the voiceless. Hence, it is extremely important to explore such works postcolonial literature.

Hosseini’s writings have been a subject of interest for countless of researchers, especially *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. This novel in particular is acknowledged for its profound treatment of heavy issues related to postcolonial feminism such as gender stereotyping, patriarchy, female bodily exile, and colonialism.

Among the researchers who have attempted to discuss the issues by Hosseini is Sahidul Islam M.D in his work “Gender Discrimination and the Wretched Conditions of women in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” (2015). This essay endeavours to draw a distinction between the representations of women in the mentioned literary works. The author raises the discussion about the portrayal of social evils such as patriarchy and gender discrimination. In addition, he points out the way in which Hosseini has taken help from the history of his own country to highlight the impact of Taliban’s religious indoctrinations on the lives of the afghan female characters. The physical and sexual abuse which the female characters are subjected to is clearly illustrated in this study.

On the other hand, Bindu Ann Philip devoted her work “Endless Endurance: A feminist study of Khaled Hosseini’s novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” (2016) to inspect the portrayal of the female protagonists from a feminist perspective in order to point out the instances of resistance shown by Laila and Mariam. The research states that it is the reality of male dominance over women in the Afghan society that relates this novel to the feminist discourse (Phillip: 791). Moreover, Phillip notes that in this novel, Hosseini preserves the classical oriental characterization of Muslim men as prototypes of sexual monstrosity and hypocrisy (792). The author concludes with a powerful statement on how the female characters’ confidence and courage helps them to create a powerful vision of female empowerment.

On the contrary, Asha G Shankar in her study “The Politics of Spotlighting on Afghan Women in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” (2015) addresses Hosseini’s representation of the Afghan women in the guise of fiction as “tortured, abused, victimized, defenceless and being in need of support from the civilized world” (149). Asha S claims that this representation is open to criticism because it aims to identify female oppression as the

norm in the Afghan Society (149). Also, the researcher sees Hosseini's representation of the 'burqa' as a sign of backwardness as it is in the mind of westerners.

In this review, it is observable that critics and researchers have approached the issue of gender stereotyping and patriarchy in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from a limited perspective to some extent by focusing mainly on the feminist theory. As a matter of fact, feminism does not extend far enough to address and cover the aspect of double colonized colonization in the novel. However, this dissertation will focus on the gender stereotypes presented in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and how various socio-cultural and political circumstances contribute to the construction of gender roles within the Afghan society. Unquestionably, convergence of patriarchal oppression with political subjugation of women cannot be examined without relying on the postcolonial feminist theory and specifically Gyatari Spivak's concept of subalternity. Equally, this dissertation casts light on Hosseini's representation of the subaltern voice.

Aiming at providing a thoroughly coherent and analytical work, it is crucial to highlight the questions raised in this research. The main question that this dissertation attempts to answer is: How does Khaled Hosseini demonstrate the influence of socio-political, cultural and traditional dimensions on the construction of gender roles in the novel? This study also endeavours to answer a set of sub-questions: How can postcolonial feminist discourse expound on the role of patriarchy in constructing gender roles in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*? What are the main forms of discriminations and violations exerted upon the female protagonists in the novel? How does Hosseini depict the female body in his representation of the subaltern voice?

For the purpose of answering the earlier stated questions, the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* will be thoroughly analysed. Subsequently, our work will be divided into two main chapters.

The first chapter, places *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a postcolonial feminist work within its socio-historical context. To begin with, the socio-historical context puts into perspective the impact of more than three decades of political instability in addition to cultural and social dogmatism on the construction of afghan woman within her community. On the other hand, the theoretical framework deals with the theory of postcolonial feminism and its major features particularly Gyatri Spivak's notion of subalternity and the creation of the subaltern subject. In addition, the major facet of postcolonial feminism which is the female figure under double colonisation will be discussed. Postcolonial feminist literature is credited for its authentic portrayal of third world women struggling to challenge male domination and political powers' indifference towards their conditions. Thus, the issue of reclaiming the female voice is devoted to third world feminists' efforts to set the stage for colonized women to celebrate their female voice. Furthermore, the female body as a private spaces sheds light on the female body as a possible liberating space. Finally, in the process of veiling and unveiling: the honour code, the research examines the multiplicity of ideological discourse related to the veiled or unveiled Muslim woman.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the novel through postcolonial feminist lens. Analysing the portrayal of the female characters Mariam, Laila and Nana allows us to reflect upon crucial concepts such as gender roles in relation to cultural and traditional exile of the female body within the novel. This chapter also attempts to examine the roots of gendered abuse exerted upon the female protagonists; most significantly, physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Moreover, the theories developed by Gayatri Spivak are heavily relied on to discuss Hosseini's representation of the subaltern voice.

On the whole, the selection of Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as the corpus of this study supports this area of investigation and provides an insight to reveal the realities concerning the situation of women in the afghan society. Therefore, this dissertation scrutinises gender stereotyping and patriarchy in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

CHAPTER ONE

SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Afghanistan has a turbulent recent history. In the last three decades, the country and its people have been subject to internal and external conflicts; the Soviet invasion in 1979, and the American intervention following the events of September 11, 2001. The years in between witnessed several military coups in addition to the rise of notorious Taliban regime. Throughout the rapidly changing political and social landscapes of Afghanistan, women's status has been exploited by the foreign newcomer as well as the patriarchal nature of gender and social relations deeply embedded in traditional societies (Moghadam, 76). However, those who are invested in the literary circle, especially in the West, tend to overlook the fact that this country had known peace and prosperity before the coming of the colonizer; that the rights and freedom of burka-clad women have not always been inhibited. In fact, women's rights in Afghanistan kept pace with the developments in the Western world until the 1990s, when war, instability, and Taliban regime brought a radical shift in the lives of women (Sweatman, 44). Therefore, the plight of women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is not anonymous with Islam throughout thousands of years of repression. Rather, it is arguably a recent development in the Afghan history.

The land of thousand splendid suns rests upon a rich heritage of oral and written traditions. It possesses a wealth of literature, unfortunately most of it is unstudied and marginalized due to the censorship practiced by the successive, strict political regimes. Thus, Contemporary third world writers such as Khaled Hosseini can be referred to as the “*new hegemony*” which aims at establishing a literary tradition that holds in its core the parallel between colonialism and the cultural subjugation of women in the third world (Katrak, 54).

Moreover, postcolonial feminist literature deliberately scrutinizes the situation of women within specific socio-historical, political and cultural context.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is shaped by the complex afghan history. It vividly portrays how specific historical events- such as the departure of the Soviets from Kabul for instance, or the arrival of Taliban- impact the lives of afghan people. What epitomizes Hosseini's historical fiction the most is its high degree of responsiveness and immediacy in attacking the issues of his people, most significantly, the role of women in society, patriarchy and colonialism. In an interview, Hosseini states that "telling the story of these two women without, in part, telling the story of Afghanistan from 1970s to the post-9/11 era simply was not possible" (BookBrowse, 2007). By interweaving historical facts, dates, leaders' real names with the fictional narrative, Hosseini's novel provides the reader with illuminations about time, place and situation of repressed, marginalized and colonized female members of society. Therefore, this section delves into the shifting position of afghan women during the long, troubled history of the country. Hence, it highlights the impact of domestic instability and external conflicts on the afghan women.

1. A land of Chastity: Afghan Women Prior to Soviet Invasion

Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eyes through the bazaars, caravans of Egypt pass one could not count the moons shimmer on her roofs and the thousand splendid suns at hind behind her walls (Tabrizi 17th Century in del Castillo 2014: 69).

A Thousand Splendid Suns is set in Afghanistan. It links directly to the afghan history, tradition, culture, and ethnicity. Hosseini narrates the stories of two female protagonists, but through his storytelling the reader explores the forgotten era in the afghan history; the era prior to the Soviet military invasion. As an Afghan-American author, Hosseini is deeply aware of the fact that most Americans know about Afghanistan from what is shown in the

media following the rise of Taliban during the 1990s. Hosseini wanted to “remind people that afghans had managed to live peaceful anonymity for decades, that the history of the afghans in the twentieth century has been largely peaceful and harmonious” (Shermon, 5). The panoramic landscapes described in the beginning of the novel suggest that Hosseini is intensely eager to make his readers acquainted with the version of Afghanistan that occupies his childhood memories. Afghanistan that was once productive and flourishing. He urges the reader to contemplate the “lush farming fields” of Kabul and to “learn of its rich past” (Hosseini, 134). The author revisits the land of chastity unspoiled by the tragic misery of the war through narrating the experiences of women going about their daily lives unafraid of any kind of harassment. No one seemed to care why they are walking the streets of Herat without a *mahrem*.¹ However, it is worth noting that such freedom of mobility is prone to considerable variations across the country: by class, ethnicity or location. Thus, women living in rural areas where entire settlements are made up of close relatives exercise greater freedom of movement outside the house than women from lower classes in urban households (Barakat and Wardell, 917). In other words, violence against women in Afghanistan differs across the regions.

Also, women’s increasing consciousness of their basic rights in particular areas of the country often challenges the rigid social structures. In the same manner, Hosseini’s portrayal of Leila as an educated woman; whose consciousness of her basic human rights is relatively high, sparks the flame of revolution in Mariam against the patriarchal injustices. However, Khaled Hosseini’s representation of female agency is both complex and multi-faceted. For instance, Nana’s status as subaltern is reinforced by her inferior birth and lack of education.

¹*Mahrem* in Islam is the unmarried family member with whom marriage is considered *haram* or illegal. During journeys longer than a day and night, it is obligatory for woman to be accompanied by a *mahrem*.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahram>

This portrayal aims at emphasising the role of women's education and class consciousness in defying social constructs such as rigid gender roles and patriarchy.

Postcolonial feminist literature often juxtaposes events to a great extent in an attempt to show the contrast between women's safe experiences in pre-war era and the atrocities of colonialism in the third world (Stuhr, 61). Indeed, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* touches on the conditions of women and the political and social upheavals which inevitably deteriorated their status as autonomous citizens. In this regard, the period from 1901 until 1979 witnessed sporadic attempts to alter the traditional laws that were unfavourable to women in particular. Historian Homa Ahmed Gosh asserts that among the most impacting efforts to amend the position of women concerned sensitive dogmas such as girl's education, forced marriages and the legal status of divorced women (Gosh, 6). Such attempts of modernization correspond to the prevailing religious tolerance and wealth of cultural traditions before the country descended into a state of chaos and deprivation.

Through his storytelling, Hosseini manages to draw an image of Afghanistan as a country of social, political, cultural and economic diversity. Depicting characters coming from different backgrounds and ethnicities is an evidence of that. However, third world writers, Afghans in particular, are careful not to conceal the status of women within the conflicting hierarchies as well as the historiographies which constitute the afghan society (Stuhr, 60). This representation aims at projecting pre-war Afghanistan as a place of diversity, learning, tolerance and gender equity. For Hosseini, it is crucial to explore the various circumstances of women's upbringing in order to understand its direct impact on their lives and decisions in the future. As a matter of fact, educated women's reaction to oppression and subalternity is different from that of the uneducated; whom lives are marked by social injustice, oppression and gendered abuse at a very young age. As an illegitimate child coming from a rural area in Afghanistan, Mariam projects a holographic image of the

afghan female who is accustomed to her husband's vicious authority. Simultaneously, she fails to recognize her status as an *othered* subaltern. In the Afghan context, as explained by Moghadam, Barakat and Wardell, patriarchal structures are deeply rooted in the afghan society constituted by different ethnic, tribal groups (N Kabeer et al, 8). In Such complex social structure, the female figure slowly fades into nothingness.

Likewise, third world writers are aware of issues that are of importance to their country and local culture. They touch on the role of women in all their novels, but it is a central theme in *A Thousand splendid Suns* (2007). Khaled Hosseini witnessed and experienced first-hand the pre-war era when women were free to attend schools and participate in the professional sphere. In the BookBrowse interview, the novelist stated that he was not raised with the sweeping notion of protecting women from outside interference. Moreover, Hosseini expressed his desire to write a story which would render his readers empathetic towards the condition of afghan women on whom the effect of war and extremism have been devastating (Stuhr, 4). Therefore, it is through storytelling that he hopes to bring depth, nuance, and emotional subtext to the familiar image of the burka-clad women. Hosseini proceeds by affirming that under the Taliban regime,

Women were denied education, the right to work, the right to move freely, access to adequate healthcare, etc. Yet I want to distance myself from the notion, popular in some circles, that the West can and should exert pressure on these countries to grant women equal rights...This approach either directly or indirectly dismisses the complexities and nuances of the target society as dictated by its culture, traditions, customs, political system, social structure, and overriding faith. (BookBrowse qtd in Stuhr, 4)

Upon the first reading of this passage, it becomes evident that Khaled Hosseini as a third world writer is sceptical about the ability of any western hegemony to ensure gender equality in the third world mainly due to the complex as well as the diverse experiences of women in their societies. From this notion, it can be argued that Hosseini's literary production tackles

the issues of the subaltern subject but the emphasis is on the subaltern resistance and rebellion to break her own silence.

However, tracking the history of foreign influence in modern Afghanistan leads us back to the rise of Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1978. The party's efforts to emancipate women through the recognition of their legal rights, including the legal age of marriage, the right for education, and abolition of polygamy, stirred stark opposition from the conservative powers represented by Islamic *ulamah*² upholding to sharia law (Kabeer et al, 6). Consequently, Hosseini's portrayal of nationalist resistance against the growing influence of foreign invader, and its impact on the lives of afghan people is based on what he saw or heard (Jones 2007). In a nutshell, being an indigenous writer infuses Hosseini's writing with accuracy and historical legitimacy.

2. The Plight of Women during the Soviet and Warlords Era

As mentioned earlier, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* includes the history of violent interference in Afghanistan throughout three decades. However, the communist ideology seeped into the afghan political and social scene even before the military invasion which took place in 1979. The communist party had a programme of modernization and began a series of radical reforms which potently affected the position of women in the society. Most of those reforms focused on anti-religious society, progress in women's education, and gender equality (Rezai, 27). The radical reforms coupled with anti-religious propaganda stimulated harsh resistance from Islamic fundamentalists. Therefore, the lives of women were largely shaped by these conflicting ideologies. Postcolonial feminist literature focuses on the autonomy and subjectivity of women under such conditions. Tom Rogers writes in his book

² In Sunni Islam, *Ulamah* refers to the religious scholars who are considered as the guardians, transmitters and interpreters of religious texts and doctrines https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/*-COM_1278

The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Analysis and Chronology that: “the Soviet leaders claimed repeatedly that the Afghan government had made requests for Soviet military assistance to which Moscow responded as an international duty” (17).

The invaders responded to the pleas of the political institution without taking into consideration neither the intricate nature of society nor the cultural mosaics of the country, particularly the diverse experiences of third world women. Indeed, postcolonial feminist discourse raises crucial questions about the relationship between the colonizer and indigenous women. In this regard, authors such as Hosseini, Amitav Gosh, and Arundhati Roy emphasise the division that occurred within colonized and postcolonial societies due to these practices.

Hosseini presents two contradictory perspectives in regard to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. He demonstrates the communist influence on the educated elites who were the main target of the Soviets. Leila’s schoolteacher father is the embodiment of this social group which were pro-education, gender equality that ensured more freedom to women and changed their role in society (Rogers, 29). In doing this, the divergence that occurred at the level of traditional gender roles is revealed. Leila’s father and Tariq are portrayed as gentle, loving, patient and protective Muslim males. In contrast, Rasheed fits into the stereotype of the controlling, oppressive husband well-regarded in patriarchal societies, represents the afghans who felt deeply provoked by those reforms. According to them, those reforms overlooked the context and reality of afghan society in addition to socioeconomic situation and deep cultural and religious sensitivities that could not be shaken easily (Nemat, 9).

Among the transformations experienced by women during the rule of the Soviets is the alteration in their physical appearance (Rezai, 29). Secularization for the Soviets meant abolishing all kinds of Islamic fundamentalism. For instance, the veil was regarded as a symbol of oppression and thus women were required to dress in a certain way to show

modernity and progressiveness. Whereas in Islam, the veil is considered as a symbol of modesty and piety. In his book *Voices Behind the Veil: The World of Islam Through the Eyes of Women* (2003), Ergun Mehmet Canor asserts that the practice of veiling goes far beyond the local mores, cultural perceptions of beauty, or even legal requirements. It gathered a range of new meaning in the past few decades. To the majority of Muslims, it symbolizes devotion, safeguard against sexual harassment, or even a critique to the tyranny of the beauty industry and Western sexism. To the Western mindset, it symbolizes the relegation of women to secluded world. Nevertheless, the political implications of the veil should not be overlooked. Whenever secularization plans are initiated, whether by the colonizer or the indigenous political institutions, the veil is the first to be condemned as “demeaning and a hindrance to a civilized nation” (103).

To be sure, the situation of women during the Soviet rule is characterized by a wide range of contradictions and obliquities. The Soviets sought to advocate atheism, secular education, and attacked traditional values and proprieties of the afghan people. As a result, women’s agency and position within the conservative society is destabilized (Khalid, 52-77). Although afghan women were granted a wide range of rights, their plight during the Soviet era is greater than ever. Women are victimized because their freedom to decide for themselves is positioned at the heart of colonial and anti-colonial discourse.

The vacuum left in the wake of the Soviets withdrawal was quickly filled by the Mujahideen or ‘holy warriors’. These militia men or warlords were divided into various groups and resolved to violence against each other as a way to seize hegemony. Khaled Hosseini writes that: “The Mujahideen, armed to the teeth but now lacking a common enemy, had found the enemy in each other” (155). It is worth pointing out that the extremist guerrilla men quickly became synonymous with rape, murder and pillage.

Similarly, the religiously developed group known as Taliban fought off rival Mujahideen and went on to take control of Kabul in 1996. Their success was largely due to men's support gained as a result of their ability to restore civil order after the chaos of the past years (Barbara, Juliene, 18). Seran de Leede affirms that this turn in events had large consequences on the position of women due to Taliban's endorsement of strict Islamic law based on extreme interpretations (4).

3. Post-Warlord Era and Women's Rights in Afghanistan

It is needless to say that Taliban, like any other religiously developed group, tended to use religious doctrines as a weapon during the civil war in Afghanistan. Hence, religion played a vital role in shaping the lives of every individual within society during that era especially women. In the same manner, religion seems to be a complicated issue in postcolonial literature. The readers of Hosseini's fiction, hence, are urged to scrutinize the fundamentalist Islamic ideology followed by Taliban and how women are most affected by it. In her "Study of Marginalized Afghan Women in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*" (2010), the feminist researcher Alice Ligorina affirms that women have varying degrees of rights when it comes to marriage, divorce, dress code and education. According to the Qu'ran, men and women are equal however the different roles inflicted upon them. She states:

Interpretation of the Koran lies at the root of these issues and has raised the name of Islam being a female intolerant religion. Islamic feminism seeks to return to the image of Islam being a beautiful and inclusive religion that promotes equality. To the contrary, *sharia* the Islamic law has thus far been formulated rules with thorny issues which include polygamy, divorce, custody of children, maintenance and marital property ect. In addition, there are also more macro issues regarding the underlying assumptions of such legislations, for example, the assumption of the man as head of the household. (Ligorina, 4)

hence, afghan women's marginalization by the opposite sex of their own nation can be ascribed to the radical religious indoctrination fuelled by patriarchal tendencies. Therefore, feminist postcolonial literature delves into the influence of politics on social norms to inspect the role of women under similar circumstances. Women in Afghanistan have been obliged to conform to specific gender roles dictated by their society in order to gain legitimacy and recognition. As Simon de Beauvoir states in her book *The Second Sex* (1953), "It is through motherhood that a woman fully achieves her physiological destiny; that is it her (woman) "natural" vocation, since her whole organism is directed toward the perpetuation of species" (921). Accordingly, women as wives or mothers undergo a process of production and reproduction, which means child bearing. However, the plight of women in patriarchal societies lies in the fact that they are expected to deliver a male child in order to carry the name of the family. Whereas a female child is considered a source of shame. Certainly, this is one of the salient instances of social discrimination depicted in the novel.

Besides, Hosseini draws further attention to the impact of the social codes implemented by Taliban and other regimes on the psychology of individuals and the way they perceive themselves and the opposite gender. For instance, in the afghan society, factors of shame and honour articulate and define the social interactions between men and women (Mohamed, 11). Thomas Scheff in "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory" (2000) asserts that shame is a fundamental emotion in building and taking part in the social bonds. This social bond is what frames the different social and cultural relationships; most importantly, friendship and family relations (85). Moreover, the feeling of shame is socially constructed. In other words, this emotion intensifies whenever threats to social bonds arise.

American sociologist Helen Lewis believes that every person "fears social disconnections, being adrift from understanding and being understood by others" (qtd in Scheff, 95). As in real life, most of the characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are conscious

of their feeling of shame and are shown in their real attempt to get rid of it by acting in a way that is culturally and socially acceptable. It can be argued that Muslim woman's shameful acts range from premarital sexual intercourse to just showing the body; this places them under unimaginable social pressure and ends with subjecting them to men's verbal and physical abuse. Also, Taliban regime manipulated women's sense of shame using religious doctrines in order to exert control on their bodies. The images of afghan women's subjugation by Taliban are once again demonstrated in the following quote:

You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, 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 so, you will be beaten. You will not paint your nails. If you do so, 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 (ATSS 278).

Thus, the veil with its connotations and symbolism was used not only to exile the female body from her surrounding, but also to indicate that the family's honour cannot be protected unless the female body is hidden from sight. Historically, as explained by anthropologist Julian Pitt Rivers, it was the responsibility of men to safeguard the household including the female in it. If women fall short of preserving their chastity, they would bring shame to the entire family members and inevitably dishonour them. In turn, many specialists believe that the ultimate vindication of the honour that was taken lies in the physical and verbal abuse (42-43). In short, confusion, shame and failure of self-identification exhibited by women in similar societies demonstrate the powerful influence of authoritative hegemony and religious ideology.

Above all, highlighting the role of religious institutions in structuring the current lives of afghan people is of great significance. The local Mullah or religious leader, as explained by Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organisation, “wields more influence and attracts greater fellowship” (Women in the Eyes of Men, 15). Interesting is the fact that Khaled Hosseini’s work alludes to the significant variations within the religious institutions and their heterogeneous approach to women. There are moderate Mullahs who tend to incarnate a more liberal viewpoint in regards to women’s education and their overall role in the social and political life. Whereas the radical Mullahs; similar to Taliban, distort religious codes by relying on select interpretation from the Qur’an, Hadiths, and other religious dictums without any contextualization (16). Hence, portrayal of mullahs as the embodiment of the liberal approach creates an ideological dilemma in literature as well as in real life.

The authoritarian ideology of Taliban has established a framework within the society which led to minimize women’s role and gradually depriving them of the voice to express their desires. Actually, the events of September 11, 2001 have intensified the Western feminist discourse regarding gender equality, freedom, and patriarchal oppression in Afghanistan. Lila Abu Lughod, in her article “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” (2002) draws attention to the importance of questioning the justifications made for American intervention in Afghanistan in terms of liberating brown women from brown men. She poses a critical question: What are the ethics of the current American war on terror, a war that justifies itself by purporting to save, or liberate, Afghan women? The former American first lady Laura Bush stated that: “Because of our military gains in Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (*The Washington Post*, 2001). The author explains that these words are hauntingly familiar to those who have studied British colonialism in South Asia. British colonialists used

the practice of *sati* and other practices to justify their military intervention. This colonial narrative of saving brown women from brown men refurbished by the Americans was in parallel with the unprecedented rise of journalistic accounts of victimized afghan women (Abu-Lughod, 784-789).

As witnessed by historians and authors alike, afghan women have been exploited by different groups, regimes and colonial powers for the sake of political, economic or social gains without any significant betterment in their status. Even after the abolishing of Taliban by the USA, the struggles of afghan women continue to reshape and re-emerge. Hence, politicians and men of letters are asked to make more efforts to create a safe world in which the afghan women, “for whom the hearts of those in the civilised world break”, can have safe and autonomous lives (Abu-Lughod, 790). Nevertheless, the endurance of postcolonial feminist literature is a testimony to third world women’s long standing resistance against patriarchal oppression, colonialism, as well as western feminist assumptions and theoretical framework.

4. Postcolonial Feminism: The Debate over Third World Women

Postcolonial feminism is often perceived as a field of inquiry that is aligned to the body of postcolonial and feminist studies. It seeks an examination to the intersecting marginalities within colonialism and neocolonialism discourses, drawing on the social and political subjugation of women (Schwarz and Ray, 53). Third world women in particular mark the long standing debate between postcolonialism and feminism. Postcolonialism as a term suggests resistance to colonial hegemony, and as a theory it attempts to defend the oppressed and marginalized groups within the context of subverting the colonizer’s discourse (Jones, 15). Though a range of postcolonial works are claimed to be male-centered, owing little if any attention to women’s struggle during the colonial era, feminist theorists direct their

critiques to such works as well to postcolonial theorists for obliterating women's efforts for independence, and for marginalizing and excluding their experiences (Gandhi, 83).

Postcolonial theorists tend to neglect female gender, concentrating only on male experiences and role in overthrowing colonialism. The reason for their neglect has to do primarily with the sense of nationalism that occurred during colonial and postcolonial eras. Nationalism contributes largely to restoring the colonized nation's sense of belonging. It also functions as a weapon to subvert colonial discourse. Yet, it is where masculine power is exerted and sexism sustains national identity, indeed, it is where women are oppressed and given one profession which is proper breeding. Women who took the same path as men against the colonizer are dreadfully written out of history. Subsequently, feminist movements stand firm to empower, and change women's position through challenging such social and political state (Gandhi, 81-82).

Feminist theorists seek an examination to the representation of women within the social and cultural contexts. The images of inferiority and marginalization painted in such contexts reinforce male dominance throughout organized social and individual relations. Significantly, feminists address the unjust power relations in which women are defined by men; their role is shaped within patriarchal structures where they are oppressed and given a place on the periphery. As such, feminists consider the very issue of equality between the two genders, aiming at redefining social structures and eliminating stereotypes of femininity and motherhood (Hooks, 14-15). Yet, women's suffering cannot be interpreted from a single perspective. Women struggle due to several social and cultural issues, thus their plight cannot be made parallel. Western feminists who articulate feminist theory have little or no understanding of third world women and their lived experiences. These women are not merely subjects to male hegemony; they are also affected by the process of colonialism. However, while nationalists endorse patriarchy, capturing women within the boundaries of

traditional stereotypes, Western feminists through their misrepresentation of third world women have also set the stage to further marginalize the colonized female subject (Mohanty, 56-57). As Spivak writes:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization (qtd In Gandhi, 89).

Western women rarely question their perspectives on third-world women, and the extent to which they reflect class and racial hierarchies. In their portrayal to third world women's experiences, they tend to rely on their own terms to neglect cultural differences. It is an attempt to make their plight and the plight of third world women synonymous, as it is an attempt to universalize women's subject of oppression. In so doing, Westerns writing on third world women paint an image of a powerless victimized group of socio-political and cultural structures. Such an image is designed to demonstrate the stereotypes inflicted to the third world along with projecting Western dominance. Western feminist writings colonize the discourse which characterizes the lives of third-world women, producing knowledge systems that serve their interests, and point towards them as the saviours of the colonized female subject. Subsequently, postcolonial female figures are always related to tradition and domesticity, whereas first world women are the bearers of civilization and modernity (Mohanty, 52-56).

In the context of overthrowing silence, third-world women reject Western feminist's definition and representation that construct the image of the other; they seek a voice to speak for them and define their own history. In this sense, Feminist postcolonial theory emerges with an attempt to offer these women a voice to speak for themselves. Through integrating the ideas of postcolonial and feminist discourses, such a theory endeavours to rewrite postcolonial female figure's history, and thus erasing the gaps created by nationalists and

Western feminists. This implies that one of the major concerns of postcolonial feminism is the rejection of binary opposition upon which patriarchal and imperial hegemony is established. Feminist postcolonial theory is then set to address the continuous debate over third-world female figures within the repressive structures of patriarchy and imperialist Western discourse that invoke the civilizing mission (Gandhi, 83-84).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique about Western feminist ethnocentrism is echoed in her book *Under Western Eyes* (1988). She laments Western marginal writings on postcolonial women, and the construction of the oppressed subject as the other to themselves, particularly as a monolithic subject. The projection of third-world women as victims, ignorant and uneducated is what sustains the image of Western women as liberated and having control over their own lives. Mohanty insists that postcolonial figures are too invisible to represent themselves, thus they are merely an object to Western knowledge. Such knowledge constructs the homogenous notion of third world difference. Mohanty refers to socio-political structures that regulate the lives of third world women to demonstrate Western women's production to double colonization (Gandhi, 54-57). Postcolonial women are subject to both colonization and patriarchy, and it is what draws upon Gayatri Spivak's contribution to feminist postcolonial theory.

The quest for a voice is another predominant issue in postcolonial feminism. The lives and experiences of postcolonial women against oppression are seen far removed from history. Western feminists seem to silence subjugated female figures in their attempts to speak or represent them, regardless of cultural differences. Thus, Gayatri Spivak challenges the notion of universality. She rejects feminist's representation to all women, and the assumptions that all women are the same. Such assumptions reinforce stereotypes which in turn construct the gendered subaltern. In other words, postcolonial women are referred to as the other within

both the imperial and patriarchal discourses. As such, Western feminists are blamed for their articulation to third world women histories, and lived experiences. Third world female figures are more complex to be represented or analysed in terms of Western critical theory. The inadequate knowledge about the subject in question mutes the oppressed groups and contains them within the dominant vocabulary of Western critique and power (Morton, 71-72). Spivak and Mohanty each make a point that in order to analyse the plight of the subaltern subject, western feminists must speak to third world women and learn from their lived experiences, as they must cease privileging themselves in terms of universal sisterhood.

Under Western representations, the third world turns into a symbol to the minor zone of non-culture and underdevelopment (Gandhi, 84). Accordingly, Postcolonial feminists refer to the result of Western hegemony which places the silenced subject on the margin. Spivak notes that “When a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the centre wants an identifiable margin, claims for marginality assure validation from the centre” (Gandhi, 84). Western feminists, speaking from the margin, reproduce imperialism and mute the oppressed groups. For Spivak, however, third world women are an unidentifiable other who must be heard.

Postcolonial feminism studies third world female figures within colonial and postcolonial structures. It examines the prevailing hierarchies of gender, race and culture. Unlike feminism, postcolonial feminist writers are not blindly concerned with redefining gender roles. They seek women’s emancipation within the repressive socio-political and cultural structures. Some feminist postcolonial theorists argue that a blinkered emphasis on racial politics inevitably eliminates “double colonization” of women under imperial discourse (Gandhi, 83). Both Gayatri Spivak and Talpade Mohanty attempt to empower and idealize third world women through making them the bearers of their own meanings and experiences which are articulated by Western analytical theory (Gandhi, 88). In so doing, they set out to

challenge Western feminism knowledge of universality and creation to third world subject. Spivak insists that “the prescription of non-Western alterity as a tonic for the ill health of Western culture heralds the perpetration of a new Orientalism” (84). The perception of difference identified by Western feminists creates an implicit culturalist hierarchy where almost inevitably third world women suffer in contrast with their Western sisters.

Postcolonial feminists scrutinize the complex ways in which gender and sexuality are at the core of nationalisms and imperialism. They set up to examine gender inequalities inscribed within a historical, socio-political, and cultural context. Thus, third world feminism is more concerned with the assertion of female figures identity, a term that is refused to be acknowledged by the West, and within their own countries.

5. The Birth of the Subaltern Subject: Giving Voice to the Voiceless

Since, as we shall see, much of the past continues into the present. And if there can be no actual taking of power in the writing of history, there can at least be a demystifying exposure of what material interests are at stake, what ideology and method are employed, what parties advanced, which deferred, displaced, defeated. (qtd. in Hall et al, 35)

The term ‘subaltern’ is used to refer to a junior ranking officer in the British army (OED) (Morton, 48). It was first used by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci in his article *Notes on Italian History*, which later on occurred in his book *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci refers to the term subaltern to denote a group of people of a ‘lower rank’, subordinate classes, and those groups eliminated from state power. The groups he intends to represent are the workers and peasants who are marginalized, and discriminated against by the dominant elite class, and whose ideas, culture and history are shaped by the ruling elite’s perspectives (Morton, 48). In his attempt to reclaim the voice of these groups, Gramsci studies the subaltern classes of consciousness and culture which are intertwined with the history of the

leadership of state. He writes “The subaltern classes by definition are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a ‘State’: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society and thereby with the history of States and groups of States” (Hall *et al*, 35-36).

Gramsci argues that the history of the South Asian peasantry and working class is articulated by the British colonial administrators, and middle class Indian elite. Such representation makes of them subordinates to the authority of the ruling groups even when they are opposed to the established state system. The social and political state imposed and dominated by elitism exclude the subaltern groups from the cultural institutions of their state, as it contains their movements of resistance within the narratives of nationalist projects of independence. Gramsci’s account of South Asian lower classes widens the scope of the subordinate subject, and invites the subaltern studies historians to further trace subaltern histories of insurgency. These scholars aim at recovering the cultures and historical practices of disempowered groups which are lost from history. They include critique to the elite class historiography as an attempt to recuperate the subaltern’s political voice and agency. In doing so, the subaltern studies historians make central to their approach the relationship between the dominant and the dominated including those between the colonizer and the colonized as a way to understand the cultural systems of expression and knowledge (Morton, 48-52).

In her analysis to the subaltern historians approach, Gayatri Spivak questions the subaltern studies group employment of the classical Marxist methodology in their attempt to reconstruct the history of the subaltern agency. The argument here is that the Marxist theory shapes the political thought constructing class consciousness which in turn influences social structures and further contributes to marginalizing the subaltern. Spivak disapproves such a theory for being too rigid to acknowledge the struggles and histories of the disempowered groups. She argues that the Marxist model of political consciousness serves to objectify and

control the subaltern through knowledge representation. Indeed, this model of political representation effectively contains the voice of the subaltern group and silences them (Morton, 50-54).

In a more critical context, the postcolonial feminist goes beyond the project of the subaltern studies group to consider the politics of gender within the Western models of class consciousness and subjectivity. She refers to the classical Marxist vocabulary of labour division to draw upon third world women's oppression and exploitation under patriarchal social relations. Indeed, women's bodies are the central site of exploitation within the Western definition of working class subject in Marxist theory. What is more, Marx's model of social and political change sustains male dominance and overlooks women's lives and histories of insurgency. Spivak argues that maintaining male dominance within society excludes women's agency from the history of anti-British colonial insurgency in India. She suggests instead a more flexible definition of the subaltern where women's struggles and experience are taken into account (Morton, 50-54).

Spivak expands the term subaltern to include the disfranchised figures in society focusing mainly on women's struggle during colonial and postcolonial eras. In her essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1985), she bases her discussion on the ideological construction of gender, suggesting that the extensive focus on class and gendered location removes women's material practices and cultural histories. Therefore, the role of women in the subaltern insurgency is written out of the colonial records and the history of national independence. This in turn maintains male dominance and further marginalizes women. As she notes, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. In this respect, the argument here suggests that subaltern women are doubly colonized. They are subjects to both colonization and patriarchal social state. This point

precisely covers the second part of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in which the representations of *sati* women are deeply analysed (Morton, 56-59).

In her discussion of *sati* or widow self-immolation, Gayatri Spivak questions the voice of women within the Hindu religious texts and British colonial discourse. In the context of Hindu religious rituals, the practice of widow self-immolation is perceived as “an exceptional sacred practice, where the widow physically repeats her husband’s death in a sacred place” (Morton, 62). Though this practice of self-immolation demonstrates how the subaltern women are subject to patriarchal dominance under religious codes. Within such social state women have no control over their own choices; their lives are dependent on their husbands’ existence. In terms of the ideological construction of gender, the act of widow self-immolation reflects on women’s free will, and serves as an exceptional signifier of the women’s model of a good wife. Spivak notes that “by the inexorable ideological production of the sexed subject, such a death can be understood as an exceptional signifier of her own desire, exceeding the general rule for a widow’s conduct” (Morton, 63). By engaging in the discussion of *sati*, she expands her arguments to address the British colonial representation of *sati* women. For the British colonial rulers, *sati*, which they refer to as *suttee*, is a brutal practice imposed by Hindu patriarchal society that must be abolished. Indeed, such a practice justifies British colonialism as a “civilizing mission” in which they are able to assert their claim of white British man saving brown women from a hegemonic patriarchal society (Morton, 62-64).

For Spivak, however, both Hindu religious codes and British colonialism representation of widow self-immolation contribute to further silencing the voice of female agency. In this context, she draws a conclusion that the subaltern as female cannot speak because her voice is not heard or recognized within such dominant systems of representation. She argues that there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak (Morton, 66).

In mapping the history of colonialism and patriarchy, feminist postcolonial writers tend to refer to the articulation of power within colonial discourse. Geraldine Moane argues that man in their attempts to control women they maintain the same systems of oppression and domination that colonize states, nations and people (18). Indeed, colonialism is regarded as a gendered process. The control and conquest of political, cultural, sexual and historical structures is not patterned similarly for men and women. This point suggests that both colonialism and patriarchy share the same language of domination. Their systems of exploitation are based on the control of social hierarchies that endorse inequality between the two genders (33).

In locating the female agency within such systems of exploitation, it is important to look more closely at patriarchal relations which rest as a model for colonial domination. John Berger notes that “In a patriarchal society, women are split subjects who watch themselves being watched by men. They turn themselves into objects because femininity itself is defined by being gazed upon by men” (qtd in. Loomba, 162). Thus, in a society dominated by men, women are exploited and oppressed in a manner that restricts their behaviour and limits their freedom. It is men who write the script and direct the play, assigning themselves the most remarkable, heroic parts, and giving women the supporting roles. In doing so, they tend to refer to the biological foundation that highlights the distinctions between them and the subjected female figures. For Simone de Beauvoir, the category of gender identity is a social construct which is controlled by dominant patriarchal institutions. As such, the brutality of men is seen as a justification for imperialism and the shaping of colonial hegemony (Moane, 28-32).

If men assert their supremacy over women through colonizing their spiritual domesticity, the colonizer will claim to be the saviour in the colonial home. Gayatri Spivak states her argument on that referring to *sati* or widow self-immolation as a symbol of oriental

barbarism. She adds that “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 296). Indeed, the very notion of saving women from the barbarity of native men is what justifies colonial mission. The colonizer sets on his mission claiming to redefine cultural structures where female figures are subject to patriarchal religious codes. In so doing, the colonizer aims at maintaining imperialist physical and mental policy as a way to further destroy the colonized social structures. The imperialist sexual division of labour is perceived as an example to insert white ideologies and superiority (Morton, 62-64). Indeed, it is where patriarchy is endorsed and the female subject is further marginalized. However, rather than defending woman’s agency, the colonizer collaborates with men to assert his white supremacy entrenching gender sexualities even deeper.

The marginalization of women’s agency under patriarchy and colonialism is sometimes promoted by women themselves. In their attempt to represent and articulate the voice of the oppressed female subject, Western feminists tend to refer to the female agency as consistently exploited and disempowered. By universalizing such notion, they invoke a view that women are always subordinate to men. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that

This focus is not on uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as “powerless” in a particular context. It is, rather, on finding a variety of cases of “powerless” groups of women to prove the general point that women as a group are powerless (Mohanty, 56-57).

The analysis of silenced women’s agency is, thus, colonialist for many reasons. These women are not only subjects to patriarchy and colonialism. They are also subjects to western feminists who claim to be their sisters. Indeed, having their struggles written out of history and materials invaded by dominant representing groups is what pushes subaltern women towards claiming a voice to speak themselves.

Any discussion on the concept of voice must consider locating the voice of silent women. Such muted subjects struggle to have their voices heard. Even though their histories and experiences are articulated by others, they feel unable to understand and find meaning to these words. They feel both deaf and dumb. Deaf for their inability to learn from the words of others and dumb because they feel so voiceless (Belenky *et al*, 24). Indeed, many postcolonial feminist writers point out the issue of Western representation to the non-European other. Such representations imply Western knowledge which produces a passive image of third world women to keep them marginalized and excluded from historical records.

In reclaiming female voice, the major concern of the project is the possibility of rewriting the silent group's history from a non-European perspective, rejecting all forms of domination, including the articulation of the histories and experiences of women within both anti-colonial nationalist and Western feminist discourses. This project takes as its central focus the identification of forms of power that are used to cast women as passive agents.

Postcolonial feminists initiate such project directing their critics to anti-colonial nationalist historiography for speaking for all people while tending to ignore women's struggle for national independence. In doing so, they set to reproduce gender inequalities that were predominant during colonial rule. Spivak emphasizes the creation of the subaltern women under the hegemonic discourse of nationalist elite. In her deconstructive reading of subaltern agency, she argues that the voice of women is not among the narrative records of nationalist bourgeois. Spivak goes further in her analysis to include women's experiences which are undermined in Western feminist discourse. She directs her critics to such group of feminists for attempting to describe third world women in terms of western vocabulary, ignoring their historical, cultural and social differences. As she criticizes them for ignoring political oppression of disempowered groups (Morton, 54-60-74-75).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty similarly contributes to this project identifying Western ethnocentrism. She suggests that western feminists seem to be the most privileged group to have the appropriate language to speak for silent women. They created the concept of “sisterhood” in which they assert an almost identical vision of female’s struggle, assuming that all women share the same patterns of oppression and indeed, it is what binds them together. Such assumptions suggest that women’s interests lay merely on subverting patriarchy. However, universalizing the oppression of women as a group regardless of class or ethnicity creates a subdued image of average third world women, as it perpetuates the othering of the subject in question. These feminists’ writings colonize the experiences and the histories of subjugated women and further contribute to silencing them. This implies that third world women are too powerless to use their language within a society where men have the authorial voice. Mohanty concludes that silent women are doubly colonized having their voices undermined and their experiences excluded from both colonial and anti-colonial discourses. (Mohanty, 52-56)

In their contribution to this project, both Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty aim at setting the stage for subaltern women to retain their voices and speak for themselves. They have come in an effort to rewrite the history of disempowered groups along with emphasising their struggles. In doing so, Spivak and Mohanty attempt to recover the silenced women’s experiences that have been lost in the discourses of dominant western representations.

Among the major struggles that define third world feminism is its exploration of third world women’s resistance against bodily exile and misrepresentation. It scrupulously analyses the role of Western feminism in oppressing the third world female body by deliberately overlooking questions of race, sex, class and neglecting the significance of placing the female body within her socio-historical and cultural context.

The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures (Douglas, 1966).

According to the definition provided by Mary Douglas, the female body may represent society, culture, history, or simply a private space within a restless geopolitical arena marked by colonial oppressions and patriarchal domination. It can be argued that third world writers' representation of the colonized female body reflects the hidden realities about the visibility or invisibility of the gendered subaltern (Romero, 13).

Leela Gandhi, a prominent postcolonial feminist figure, observes that the quarrel between Western feminism and the third world feminism does not end with the conviction of Western feminism for its theoretical articulation of third world women. This hegemonic feminist discourse is also blamed for claiming the privilege of representing the indigenous female body; including her constructions; her acceptable and censored expressions; even her location culturally and materially in postcolonial regions (Gandhi, 89; Katrak, 8). Thus, third world feminism reclaims the muted voice of third world women by decolonizing the female body from the liberal feminist attempts to represent or speak of them.

In fact, the politics of the female body constitute a central concept in postcolonial feminist criticism and in Spivak's body of work in particular. In her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak rigorously elaborates on the contexts wherein hegemonic representational systems brutally invade, dislocate and destabilize the unity and wholeness of the female subject. The theorist claims that the gendered subaltern disappears because she is never given the platform to speak or express her desires. Rather, she is reduced to a mere medium through which the conflicting discourses impose their claims. Franz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* (1965) is a case in point. Fanon projects the 'veiled Algerian woman' as a zone of rivalry between the colonial and anti-colonial powers. In that sense, the colonizer's

targeting the Algerian patriarchy can be perceived as a strategic attempt to weaken the national revolution. The colonizer, Fanon informs us, crumbles the Algerian society through its women: “If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight” (Fanon, 14).

In addition, third world writers often portray the colonized female body as object of supervision and control through patriarchal practices. For most female subjects, experiences of patriarchal domination are gender specific and rooted in the control of female sexuality (Katrak, 9). These relatively cultural practices are largely reinforced by colonial morality. Hence, Spivak addresses the sexist inequities and other cultural differences that are elemental factors in exiling the female body from her native culture. For instance, motherhood is glorified, validated and even romanticized only within heterosexual, religiously institutionalized marriage. Any other manifestations of female sexuality inflict her body with qualities of impurity and otherness.

Therefore, politics of the female body involves socialization involving levels and layers of ideological influences; socio-cultural and religious codes, which imposes knowledge or ignorance of female bodies and construct women as gendered subject or object. Third world writers portray the hardships of women to challenge patriarchal practices and the stereotypical definitions of mother, daughter, widow, grandmother. Concepts of womanhood, fertility, wifehood intentionally or unintentionally “constitute an ideological framework that controls women’s bodies” (Katrak, 9.).

At a symposium held in 2011 at the Centre of Postcolonial Theory in Frankfurt, Spivak stresses the significance of rethinking the sense of critique; what makes it potentially workable.

As a matter of urgency, Spivak draws attention to the possibility of addressing the female body rather as a potentially liberating zone from patriarchal oppression and imperial fallacies. Nonetheless, female body can be seen as a subversive site for memory and resistance. Satya P Mohanty (2000) states that “women’s experiences are often significant repositories of oppositional knowledge” (39). In other words, through writing the body, readers can perceive a more authentic view of the past; a past that is distinguishable from the one promoted and advocated by radical discourses. The experiences of women as victims of psychological, sexual or physical abuse can provide us with insight into that past.

On the same note, Spivak identifies the female body as a bordered whole that should neither be subject to society’s abstracted conventions nor male’s shifting desires regarding her role in society. Spivak denounces the notion of shifting desires as it connects on deeper level with violence against women, and calls for acknowledging and respecting those borders. For the sake of argument, Gayatri Spivak explains that the famous Indian Bhubaneswari Bhaduri’s termination of her own body through the Hindu law of *Sati* is a statement of resistance against the cultural, political and sexual violation of the private space of women in colonized India (Kasic, 2). At the same time, this act can be interpreted as the extent to which the female body can function as a sole possibility to voice one’s inner desire to be heard.

Leading figures of postcolonial feminism Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty have frequently attempted to rescue the third world women from hegemonic Western discourse by drawing attention to the nexus between patriarchy, colonialism and essentialism. This latter is defined as Western homogeneous grouping of third world women marked by common “dependencies and powerlessness” (Bahri, 197-201). In other words, the underlying Western feminist assumptions about female agency and freedom of choice may not hold true for third world women as they usually do in Western culture. Indeed, homogeneous representations of

a collective whole create stereotypical images of third world women wherein any dimension of individuality and subjectivity is surpassed (Hassan, 87). Indeed, the process of veiling and unveiling of Muslim women is one the extremely polarising debates in postcolonial feminist criticism.

If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out, or more precisely, on how and where women see dominance (Minh ha, 1998).

Similarly, this debate provides a wide theoretical and conceptual scope to discuss female agency and resistance within an overwhelming multiplicity and convergence of discourses.

In her article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse” (1984), Chandra Mohanty refutes the Western production of the third world woman as monolithic, singular subject cut off from her cultural, socio-historical roots. To use Spivakian terms, Mohanty believes that certain modes of codification and appropriation of knowledge about Muslim women is never innocent. In reality, this knowledge is rather a power of ideology intended as an intervention into the social construct of third world women, which is inevitably used as a justification for colonialism (334-335). According to her, the West uses the rhetoric of the veil as a tool of oppression to reinforce the notion of Muslim women as either ‘backward’, ‘oppressed’ or ‘in desperate need of liberation’, regardless of the specific meaning attached to the veil, nor the cultural, historical or ideological context in which women wear it. She states:

The argument goes like this: the more the number of women who wear the veil, the more universal is the segregation and control of women. Similarly, a large number of different, fragmented examples from a variety of countries also apparently add up to this universal fact. For instance, Muslim women in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan...all wear some sort of veil. Hence, this indicates that sexual control of women is a universal fact in those counties in which the women are veiled (Mohanty, 346)

This viewpoint advocated by liberal feminists upholds that the mere act of veiling is another repressive practice which echoes the submissive position of women within patriarchal society. In fact, this essentialist account has been harshly criticized by Spivak. On the same line of thought, Homa Hoodfar, in her study “The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women” (1993) argues that practice of veiling can be read as a tool against Western essentialism. Moreover, it is a significant emblem for women’s agency and cultural identity (5-6). In other words, the widespread of the veil came to be read as a manifestation of the rise of Islamist discourse which emphasizes the necessity of creating an Islamic identity based on pure Islamic principles (Eid, 40). Accordingly, re-drawing gender roles in Islamic societies should not be prone to western feminist assumptions.

However, many critics believe that any discourse derived from fundamentalist Islamic ideology is problematic because it raises critical questions about female agency in Islamic societies, female consciousness or false-consciousness for that matter. In other words, the blurred line between wearing the veil out of personal choice or as a social and religious requirement in Islamic societies continue to generate hot debates within third world feminist criticism. Yolande Geadah in her book *Veiled Women: Fundamentalism Exposed* (1996) asserts that this fundamentalist ideology endeavours to impose the veil on the female body as an attempt to contain her excessive sexual radiance which, if not controlled, will cause Fitna³ or “social chaos” (Eid, 42). It is worth noting that the honour code deeply embedded in Islamic societies directly relates to the patriarchal surveillance of women’s bodies. Since men’s honour is associated with women’s behaviour and sexuality, keeping the sexed female body behind the curtains; within the confinement of the house, is a necessity in order to protect the honour of men (Khan, 8). Owing to the fact that honour is a major social factor;

³Fitna means “to afflict (in particular as a way of testing someone’s endurance); to disrupt the peace of a community; to tempt; to seduce; to allure, to infatuate.” Badawi & Haleem (2008), p. 692.

often an extremely sensitive one, the imposition of the veil may constitute different sorts of violence against women, most significantly, psychological and physical violence.

Therefore, many critics consider the issue of the veil a central concept in postcolonial feminist literature and in Spivak's literary criticism chiefly due to the intricate and multi-layered nature of the subaltern woman's life experiences. These experiences are deeply rooted in various patriarchal practices as well as in colonial assumptions in regards to liberating oppressed, veiled women from their male counterpart. In this respect, Spivak argues that the combined oppressions of patriarchy and colonialism render the veiled or unveiled subaltern women extremely unable to voice their point of view because these women "cannot know or speak the text of female exploitation" (Spivak, 84).

CHAPTER TWO: THE POLITICS OF GENDER IN HOSSEINI'S A

THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

Each snowflake was a sigh heaved by an aggrieved woman somewhere in the world. That all the sighs drifted up the sky, gathered into clouds, then broke into tiny pieces that fell silently on the people below. As a reminder of how people like us suffer, she'd said. How quietly we endure all that falls upon us (ATSS, 82).

Third world writers might be daunted by the responsibility of re-presenting one's own culture and to teach others about it. To raise critical discussions about the place of women within their native culture lays further pressure on writers since they have to deal with multi-layered beliefs and traditions deeply rooted in native customs and colonial influence. Undoubtedly, afghan female characters would find it difficult to assert their sovereignty while facing various kinds of discrimination within their restrictive social and traditional establishments. Reading postcolonial feminist literature, we instantly get the impression that women have to adhere to socially and culturally constructed roles ascribed to them by men otherwise they face penance and alienation. In some representations, female protagonists as mothers, daughters, widows and wives have to make compromises instead of negotiating to change prevalent paradigms.

1. Cultural and Traditional Exile of the Female Body

Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* brings to the centre the life experiences of Mariam and Leila and Nana as they endure all kinds of discriminations and contradictions their mother culture throws at their way. In the afghan context, cultural traditions and attitudes fostered by indigenous and colonial powers, during colonialism and even after national independence, often teach women to be strong, docile, self-reliant, passive, hopeful, melancholic, silent and rebellious. These contradictory messages are likely to result in a split

within the subjectivity of the female character. On the long term, women's position gets weaker in front of the opposite gender. Plainly, the novel portrays female characters' strive to "*achieve their subaltern voice*" under the combined cultural, social and political oppressions (Shabanirad & Seifi, 244).

As an illegitimate daughter of Jalil, the wealthy businessman, Mariam is accustomed to her status as "*harami*" – a bastard. At first she did not know what that word meant, but "*Mariam did surmise, from the way Nana (Mariam's mother) said the word, that it was an ugly, loathsome thing to be a harami, like an insect, like the scurrying cockroaches*" (ATSS, 4). Nana, Jalil's maidservant, is at a state of exile living in the margins of society. Her physical and spiritual exile represents a punishment for disgracing her family's name and violating cultural and traditional codes. In the afghan culture, any manifestation of female sexuality outside of marriage is mystified and condemned as 'Westernization' or rejection of native culture. Although she blames society's male centrism and repeatedly reminds Mariam that it is her father who raped, betrayed and casted her out. Also, Nana cannot stop blaming her daughter for being born in the first place. A close examination reveals that Mariam's birth marks her initiation into subalternity because she cannot know how to articulate herself as a person; she "*was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, acceptance*" (4). Hence, one could not but draw the parallel between third world women's relationships with their mother cultures and their biological mothers for both mothers broke something inside Mariam in attempt to thicken her skin for the bleak future.

The novel demonstrates various traditional gender role mystifications, most notably, wifehood and motherhood. Traditionally, wifehood is supposed to bring fulfilment, completeness and protection to third world women. However, this is not the case for the female protagonists in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The prominent feminist scholar Uma

Narayan in her book *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* (1997) observes that mothers who often complain about the oppressiveness of marriage ironically refuse to see their daughters reject arranged marriages. In addition, Narayan stresses the notion of redefining “*cultural loyalty, betrayal, and respect*” in order to bring a kind of equilibrium between the experiences of privileged men and disadvantaged women (8-9). Mariam cannot raise her voice against the forced marriage because it would be considered as a betrayal. Moreover, Mariam’s voice cannot be heard or read because her father is not ready to listen to her. As De Beauvoir points out, unprivileged women are “*not raised to the nobility of a man; she herself is a piece of man's patrimony, first her father's and after that her husband's*” (De Beauvoir, 93). Apparently, age gap between Mariam and Rasheed is not an issue for her father and his three wives. What really matters for them is the opportunity to “*erase, once and for all, the last trace of their husband's scandalous mistake. She was being sent away because she was the walking, breathing embodiment of their shame*” (ATSS, 45).

Miriam’s social status does not allow her to detach herself from her cultural and traditional roots. More to the point, Mariam’s false-consciousness is obvious to the reader when she is easily deceived to see hope and salvation in the marriage institution. Hosseini narrates that: “*Mariam wished her mother were alive to see this. To see her, amid all of it. To see at last that contentment and beauty were not unattainable things, even for the likes of them*” (ATSS, 73). Under the protectiveness of her husband, she feels “*prized...Treasured and significant*” (ATSS, 73). However after many miscarriages her status within the household dramatically deteriorates. Mariam is intellectually exiled from her community; her lack of education and knowledge about her own body makes her superstitious; believing that it is her mother’s “*Jinn*” that caused the miscarriages. To this notion, Hosseini does not implicitly project any form of radical discourse but the situation is suffice to be perceived as a critique to the established stereotype of hysteria and irrationality transmitted from mother to

daughter in third world societies. Marriage then becomes Mariam's own imprisonment. In the afghan society, fertility and motherhood are considered as shields; a resistance mechanism against marital oppression and female degradation. Now that she is broken and defenseless, Rasheed becomes increasingly violent towards Mariam. He does not miss an opportunity to remind Mariam of her backwardness. In his opinion, "*superstitions were largely female preoccupation*" (ATSS, 58).

Postcolonial feminism is predominantly concerned with third world women's dynamic and heterogeneous cultural experiences. Moreover, it draws upon the specificity of each woman's experience being "*dependant on her surrounding and is structured by class, religion... and colonialism*" (Hamam, 11). Indeed, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* authentically depicts the relative cultural impact on the lives of women in various parts of the afghan society. Rasheed, who is culturally and traditionally conditioned to be dominant and in control, often perceives open minded men like Laila's father as "inferior" just because his wife and daughter do not wear a burqa.

Mostly, they live in richer parts of Kabul...but they are here too, Mariam...these soft men. There's a teacher living down the street, Hakim is his name and i see his wife Fariba all the time walking the streets alone with noting on her head but a scarf. It embarrasses me, frankly, to see a man who's lost control of his wife" (63).

Indeed, Laila's father is an educated man whose perception of marriage and girls' education stems from his strong belief in gender equality. This progressive characterization of an afghan man can be addressed as a demythologization of western essentialist and homogenous representation of the Muslim *other* as 'insensitive', 'barbaric' and 'backward'. Hakim believes that Laila's schooling is "*the most important in his life, after her safety*" (ATSS, 62). He tells his daughter that:

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 (ATSS,62).

On the other hand, Nana's body is a citadel of cultural and social injustices hence her inability to raise her voice against the mainstream shapes her perspective on girl's education. She tells Mariam: *"What's the sense schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon ...There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and I need in life, and they don't teach it in school...Only one skill and it's this Tahamul, Endure"* (10). Through this striking contrast in the portrayal of Laila and Mariam's upbringing, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* brings to the surface the diverse experiences of women against the backdrop of cultural heterogeneity in the third world.

Similarly, Hosseini's narrative addresses the vulnerability of afghan society under the powerful influence of the colonizer's ideology, especially the Soviets. This vulnerability results in additional disarray in the location of the female subject especially when indigenous women from upper classes express solidarity and alliance with the colonizer. With the communists' attempts to transform and modernize the conservative Afghan society, they implement secular policies on women's bodies. Laila's teacher Khala Rangamaal supports these policies and prohibits girls from wearing the veil at school because it is considered as symbol of oppression and misogyny. She claims that the Soviet Union is the best nation in the world and refers to the Mujahedeen as 'anti-progressive' and 'backward bandits'. The teacher uses her privileged, hegemonic position to indoctrinate girls:

That's why our Soviet comrades came here in 1979. To lend their neighbour a hand. To help us defeat these brutes who want our country to be a backward, primitive nation. And you must report anyone who might know about these rebels. It's your duty. You must listen, then report. Even if it's your parents, your uncles or aunts. Because none of them loves you

as your country does. Your country comes first, remember!
(ATSS, 101).

Since her two brothers are volunteered members of the Mujahedeen, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Laila to locate herself within her community and family dynamic since both her family and school teachers hold such conflicting perspectives about freedom, nationalism, modernity and gender equality. In the midst of all these conflicting ideologies, Laila's individuality is slowly falling apart.

To this notion, is worthy to stress the idea that any form of coalition between the indigenous elites and the colonizer in attempt to speak for powerless women and restore their agency is ethnocentric and mostly based on the denial of even the existence of diversity among women living within the same society. In other words, Laila during her early stages of life is valued and protected by her father but the female elites who tend to re-group themselves with the colonizer as 'superior' think of Laila as a 'victim' therefore 'inferior'.

True that Laila's upbringing is very stable compared with Mariam's; her plight however has begun as a personal or emotional one. Laila feels anxious and disappointed because she believes that her mother prefers her brothers even though she is overtly cherished by her father. Laila's sense of inferiority gradually intensifies because her mother cannot know how to appreciate her existence; even after the death of her brothers in the battlefield: "*now they're both shaheeds, my [Laila's mother] boys, both martyrs*" (182). Indeed, martyrdom and jihad against the colonizer and its attempts to disrupt their cultural identity is considered as the highest form sacrifice and dignity among the majority of afghans. Besides, these chauvinistic sentiments are exclusively associated with notions of manhood or masculinity. For that reason, Laila as a girl is overshadowed by her brother's glory; she is even "*excluded when the talk turned to her brothers, as though the women were discussing a beloved film that only she hadn't seen.*" (ATSS, 108). However, it is only after her parents get brutally

killed that Laila comes face to face with the dark side of her society and culture. An orphan girl like Laila cannot live on her own in a conservative society. Rasheed then takes the opportunity and coerces Laila to marrying him. As a tyrannical oppressor, Rasheed subjects Laila to the same oppression as Mariam when she fails to deliver a male heir.

Mariam, Laila and Nana are subalterns forced to fall under the cultural, social, and political hegemonic structures because what constitutes them as female subjects is marginalized. They are turned into transparent and invisible objects in the hands of their father, husband as well as the elites of the society whom narrow outlook on colonialism continue to construct the female subaltern (Spivak, 89).

Coming from two different generations and cultural backgrounds, Mariam was born and raised into subalternity whereas Laila is forced into it by circumstance. It is worth noting that the most significant dissimilarity between the two female characters is reflected in the way each one of them perceives subalternity. While Mariam and Nana passively endure discrimination, Laila is portrayed as a smart, self-conscious girl whose education and liberal upbringing injects her with what Spivak deems as necessary to break free from the society's restraints.

2. The Myth of the Patriarchal Family

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 20th century were the slaves of their father, husband, father-in-law, and elder brother. Her most valued characteristic was silence and obedience (Rahimi, 6).

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a salient literary prototype on how powerful institutions monopolize religious texts to serve patriarchal interests. Literary analogy of “women as

nation” is largely drawn from the symbolic representation of women as bastion of religious, cultural and traditional beliefs of the nation (Dharmani, 210, & Young, 63). Men, thus, become the epitome of nationalism and are hailed as the “*protectors who protect women and nation from outside invasions*” (210). As depicted by Hosseini, the radicalization of Islam came with the rise the Mujahedeen and Taliban after the Soviet invasion. The previously mentioned militia men claim that they are the protectors of afghan women; however, their strict interpretation of qu’ranic verses tends to reinforce the position of men as morally and physically superior to women. Hence, the myth of the patriarchal family becomes institutionalized. Notwithstanding its prevalence in the text, patriarchy exists long before the birth of Islam. Thus, it can be argued that the position of women in the novel largely depends on the way in which the successive ruling powers interpret and deconstruct religion.

Hosseini presents religious double standard through the characters of Rasheed and Jalil. They claim to be good adherents to God’s word but their actions demonstrate the opposite. They oblige their wives to wear the burqa; claiming that a woman’s face is her “*husband’s business only*” (ATSS, 63). Paradoxically, they drink alcohol; indulge in pre-marital sexual intercourse, beat their wives and segregate between sons and daughters. Furthermore, the author uses the religious and cultural symbolism of the ‘perfect wife’ to indicate the complicated levels in which the patriarchal society objectify, sexualize and deprive the female body of her meaningful essence. Hosseini writes:

She [Mariam] would have to concede to his moods and his issued demands. She would have to clean after this man, Rasheed, cook for him and his clothes...Nana had told her what husbands did to their wives...She was no better than these pots and pans, something that could go neglected, then laid claim to, at will, whenever the mood struck (ATSS, 48-148).

Dowry or bride-price is a common tradition in Muslim societies. Although afghan women are supposed to be respected and valued, the dowry in some tribal areas signifies transferring

the sexual rights of women from her father to her husband. In extreme situations, the dowry gives the husband the right to have control over the children in the future. Mariam is not even given her dowry. By forcing her to marry a man twice her age, Mariam's father turns her to a commodity by surpassing her desire as an autonomous subject and handing her over to Rasheed for free. Besides, polygamous marriage is another phenomenon legalized by law and religious institution in Muslim countries whereby women in particular areas are mistreated. Rasheed decides to marry Laila as a second spouse in spite of Mariam's disapproval. Rasheed tells her *"it's not your decision. It's hers and mine"* (208). Akin to her mother, such patriarchal practices evoke the feeling of inherited inferiority and powerlessness in Mariam which reinforces her passive endurance to her husband's violations instead of fighting back to secure her rights.

Women in some conservative societies have to safeguard their chastity and virginity for their husbands. Also, it is common in these societies to evoke religious and social codes such as honour and shame when it comes to female sexuality. This is evident when Laila's mother warns her to be careful for what society might say about her relationship with Tariq: *"He [Tariq] is a boy, you see, and, as such, what does he care about reputation of a girl, especially one as pretty as you, is a delicate thing Laila. Like a mynah bird in your hands, slacken your grip and away it flies"* (ATSS, 146). Arguably, female sexuality is at the very core of patriarchal discourse. Upon the first reading of the novel, it is clear that Hosseini's portrayal of Laila as an afghan woman whose education, self-confidence and consciousness; a girl who's in control of her sexuality, seem to play strategic role in breaking the shackles of patriarchy. Consequently, through the character of Laila Hosseini shatters the stereotypical image of powerlessness and obedience inflicted onto afghan women. Prior to her miserable marriage to Rasheed, Laila rebels against the mainstream and risks her reputation by having a sexual relationship with her childhood lover Tariq before he immigrates to Pakistan. Still,

Laila could not shake the overwhelming sense of shame and guilt before the enormity of their deed:

Laila saw three drops of blood on the rug, her blood, and pictured her parents sitting on this couch later, oblivious to the sin that she had committed. And now shame set in, and the guilt, and, upstairs, the clock tickled on, impossibly loud on laila's ears. Like a judge's gravel pounding again and again, condemning her (ATSS, 165).

On the other hand, Laila remains uncharacteristically silent towards Rasheed's religious bigotry at the beginning of their marriage because she is well aware of the danger that would fall upon her if Rasheed finds out about Tariq; the father of her unborn child. Therefore, Laila compromises her agency and complies with her husband's demands including wearing the burqa. Overall, women as guardians of tradition is a belief deeply rooted in the collectively of afghan society in which religious prejudice and double-standard penetrates almost all aspects of life (Katrak, 159).

Interestingly, the novel portrays the religion of Islam and its approach to women from multiple perspectives, precisely through the depiction of religious men as moderate. Mullah Faizullah encourages Nana to allow Mariam to pursue her education. When she objects, he persisted on teaching her qu'ranic verses himself, stating that: *"They'll comfort you too, Mariam jo... you can summon them in your time of need, and they won't fail you. God's words will never betray you"* (ATSS, 16).

The misuse of religion is further manifested in the gender based policies implemented by Taliban which aim at restricting women's freedom of mobility and thus exiling them from the public sphere. As a supporter of this patriarchal ideology, Rasheed instructs Laila to avoid *"leaving the house without my [Rasheed] company...I also ask you that when we are out together, that you wear a burqa"* (223). He claims that keeping her at home is merely a safety measure but in reality Laila is being forcefully situated under Rasheed's watchful eyes;

turning her to an object of surveillance. From socio-psychological angle, Rasheed's extreme obsession with keeping his women out of sight exposes his own fear for his social image, masculinity, "*honor and pride*" (ATSS, 63).

Additionally, Taliban's chauvinistic ideology enthused by Islamic fundamentalism tends to reduce female characters to insignificant beings who are heavily reliant on their male counterpart. Indeed, sexual division of labour in the afghan society is highly debated particularly during the era of Taliban. Men are idealized and championed as breadwinners whereas women's most honourable role is to stay at home and take care of the husband and children. Women like Mariam and Laila are denied daily access to educational and health services because the political power deliberately marginalizes their existence. These laws often deny women the equal opportunities men have, therefore, aborting any attempts of possible female insurgency. In other words, education and freedom of mobility might warrant the female subaltern a "*chance at hegemony*" (Spivak, 81). Also, Hosseini uses the burqa imposed by the militia men to allude unto the omnipresent subjugation and violence done to women in the name of Islam. This is evident when Laila is at the hospital giving birth to her child and the doctor informs Mariam that "*They (Taliban) won't give me what I need. I have no X-ray either, no sedation, no oxygen, not even simple antibiotics. When the NGOs offer money, the Taliban turn them away. Or they funnel the money to the places that cater to men*" (ATSS, 283). As she watches Laila undergo the surgery without any sedation; fully covered in the black cloth, Mariam arrives at a powerful moment of epiphany: even when they are performing the most glorified and honourable role in society, women like them have to suffer nonetheless. Mariam then becomes like a mother to Laila; a "*silent supporter and an anchor*" for her (Rabbani & Chaudhury, 38).

Certainly, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* demonstrates how afghan women are brought to the centre of socio-political debates in which the religion of Islam is the promoter of oppression

and cruelty. Taliban's endorsement of the myth of patriarchal family as a sacred institution including other acts of violence against women became the face of Islam. This is quite apparent when Laila and Mariam are arrested for attempting to cross the borderers and flee to Pakistan without a *mahrem*. The Talib officer makes it clear that God has created men and women differently alluding to women's mental inability to succeed in anything without men's supervision.

“I wonder,” the young Talib said. “God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can. Western Doctors and their science have proven this. That is why we acquire only one male witness but two female one” (ATSS, 322).

Taliban's systematic distortion and manipulation of religious texts not only shapes the figure of female figure as double colonized, but also brings to the surface the historic clash of civilizations between the West and the East significantly after the events of 9/11. Through his portrayal of the Soviet invasion and Taliban regime ousted by the American forces, Hosseini concentrates on how afghan women's agency, hopes and aspirations are impacted especially when the previously mentioned hegemonies use religion to construct their radical discourse then impose them on the female body.

3. Power Relations and Sexual Hegemony

Simone de Beauvoir suggests that gender is constructed, it is not determined under biology rather it is identified under social and cultural structures. According to her “*one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one*” (Butler, 12). The belief that gender is culturally constructed draws upon the operation of power within society. Man and woman's behaviours are expected to be different based on their identified sex, thus, each is assigned different social roles. Butler maintains that “*everyday actions, gestures, speech utterances, representations, dress codes and behaviors produce what is perceived as men or women or*

gender”(Istikomah, 19). The corresponding consequences of such different behaviours implemented by society create gender discrimination. Indeed, when man is perceived as superior holding authority over woman, the second sex itself becomes a marginalized subject. This implies that women are powerless and given less social value. Young states that *“marginalization is the most harmful form of oppression since whole people –in this case are women– cannot participate at all in public life and it can make the people suffer from material deprivation and even extermination”* (Istikomah, 20). In other words, gender difference leads to the subordination of women under patriarchal system which is due to the socially attributed roles to women. The fact that men are always connected to power and considered as the upper hand of society while women are confined to domestic life generates male violence and further undermines the female subject.

Afghanistan as any other patriarchal society contributes to gender inequality through theorizing male dominance over women. It is within its cultural structures that the roles of both genders are shaped. Mainly its traditional practices influence man and women’s attitudes constructing the notions of manhood and ideal womanhood. In a traditional social context, afghan men are perceived as the providers for their family along with taking the major responsibilities assigned to them. For instance, man’s work is outside the house, he is assumed to be the breadwinner of the family, thus, it is his duty to maintain the good being of his wife and children. Being a breadwinner is only one of his responsibilities. As a man and a father, providing *nafaqah* or financial subsistence is another of his duties. On the other hand, women’s responsibilities are different from those of man, that is, since man is placed as the head of the family, women should handle the domestic tasks including household chores, breeding and raising the children as well as serving their husbands in all ways possible. Further, the ideal woman must be obedient and follow her husband’s orders. On such account, the sexual division of labour underlines the issue of gender inequality and the

practice of power within society. afghan women's position is inferior to that of man. The fact that they are taking care of the house; cooking, washing the clothes and being engaged in the work of reproducing society places men highly in the community, therefore, they think that women are their slaves or captives. Indeed, the way man is privileged in society while women are excluded from basic social activities constructs patriarchal principles and inserts hegemonic masculinity (Echavez *et al.*, 17-27). As Saigol states,

The most consistently observable effects of patriarchy across time periods and cultures have been the denigration of women, reduction of women to lesser status as citizens, subordination of women to male authority in both the public and private spheres, and the devaluation of all that is considered feminine (Romaissa, 16).

In the light of what is mentioned earlier, afghan women seem to suffer and lose their voices under male hegemony and within a patriarchal society. Therefore, gender equality is one of the issues that they are fighting for. Philip argues that,

Gender equality is the longest war that women have been fighting for a long time. Throughout history, women across the world who have fought for gender equality are considered as feminists. Women in Afghanistan have been going through gender equality issues in its severe form for ages (Romaissa, 15).

Tradition and culture in Afghanistan have a great influence on gender relations. The social and ideological constructions of gender principles prescribe the roles of both man and women. Such principles impose the notion of masculinity and femininity where women are inferior to men. In fact within a social context, women are referred to as the second sex or the other while man is considered as the head of society masculinity (Echavez *et al.*, 26-27). De Beauvoir argues that “*women's oppression lies in the belief that man is the self and woman is the other*” (Banerji & Irshad, 7). This implies that women are constantly oppressed and discriminated because of their subordination to male authority. De Beauvoir further claims that “*woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never*

shared the world in equality” (Banerji and Irshad, 8). Indeed, unequal power relations within both society and family result in the creation of gender discrimination.

Khaled Hosseini uses his novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to demonstrate the plight of women in afghan society. He claims that female characters are victims to violence and male dominance. The main reason behind their oppression is the social and cultural norms which impose masculine standards. Furthermore, male power is perceived at the core of constructing gender under patriarchy. Kate Millett states that “patriarchy always exaggerates biological differences between the sexes to make certain of men’s domination, or masculine roles, and women’s subordination, or feminine roles through the process of socialization” (Banerji & Irshad, 9). Men socialize the notion that women are powerless and dependent on them to insure male hegemony, as they go further to consider women as only objects who must be obedient because they are living under male’s rule. As depicted in the novel, Mariam cannot go against the firm patriarchal customs of her society when she is forced to marry Rasheed. It is her father Jalil who decides for her destiny. Despite her refusal to such marriage, no one seems to listen to her.

“You have a suitor,” Khadija said. Mariam’s stomach fell. “A what?” she said through suddenly numb lips.

Mariam’s chest was tightening. The room was reeling up and down, the ground shifting beneath her feet (ATSS 46).

“I don’t want to,” Mariam said. She looked at Jalil. “I don’t want this. Don’t make me.” She hated the sniffling, pleading tone of her voice but could not help it (47).

This shows the way women’s voices are muted within a patriarchal society and under hegemonic masculinity. Further, by refusing to marry Rasheed the shoe maker, Jalil’s wives attempt to convince Mariam to accept such marriage, asking her to be rational “*Now, be reasonable, Mariam. You can’t spend the rest of your life here. Don’t you want a family of*

your own? You have to move on” (47). It is apparent from these lines that women’s roles are shaped within patriarchal ideologies, thus, their subordination is anchored in social structures which are defined by men. Similarly, Laila is another female character who is dragged to marry Rasheed because of her vulnerable position. As an orphan and a pregnant woman, she cannot survive in a society ruled by Taliban. It is because during such violent regime, women who are found alone are tortured, raped and killed.

At this, Rasheed smiled sadly. “There is another option,” he said, scratching the sole of one foot with the calloused heel of the other. “She can leave. I won’t stand in her way. But I suspect she won’t get far. No food, no water, not a rupiah in her pockets, bullets and rockets flying everywhere. How many days do you suppose she’ll last before she’s abducted, raped, or tossed into some roadside ditch with her throat slit? Or all three?” (ATSS 209).

Knowing that she won’t survive unless she is under a male’s roof, Laila accepts to marry Rasheed. This implies that women are subordinates and have no control over their lives. They have to follow men’s commands because men are powerful.

Moreover, in Afghanistan boys are favoured in society by man as well as by women themselves. In the novel, when Mariam was pregnant for the first time, a neighbour suggests that having a son is better than having a girl because boys carry the name of the family.

“Do you want a boy or a girl first?”
“The Minarets! Oh, what beauty! What a gorgeous city!”
“Boy is better, Mariam jan, they carry the family name” (ATSS 66).

It is clear from the quotation mentioned above that afghan women also contribute in socializing patriarchal customs which result in further marginalizing the female subject.

Rasheed on the other hand is obsessed with the idea of having a male heir. He insists that Mariam is going to give birth to a boy whom he is willing to give a name. Certainly, Rasheed prefers boys, hence, he does not want to be disappointed by having a girl.

Rasheed was drumming his gloved fingers and humming a song. Every time the bus bucked over a pothole and jerked forward, his hand shot protectively over her belly.

“What about Zalmai?” he said. “It’s a good Pashtun name.” “What if it’s a girl?” Mariam said.

“I think it’s a boy. Yes. A boy.”

“If it’s a girl,” Rasheed said, “and it isn’t, but, if it is a girl, then you can choose whatever name you want” (ATSS 85).

When Mariam fails to give him a male heir, Rasheed keeps blaming her, as he turns into a cruel husband mistreating and ignoring her. He eventually expects his second wife to please him. Yet, Laila’s first child is a girl named Aziza. Rasheed hates the little child. He is disappointed again, thus, he turns more violent beating both his wives. Later on, Laila gives birth to a baby boy named Zalmai. Rasheed shows inferior treatment to Aziza. He continues to scold and ignore the little girl whereas he buys a new crib and toys to Zalmai and moves him into the bed he shares with Laila.

When Zalmai was born, Rasheed had moved him into the bed he shared with Laila. He had bought him a new crib and had lions and crouching leopards painted on the side panels. He’d paid for new clothes, new rattles, new bottles, new diapers, even though they could not afford them and Aziza’s old ones were still serviceable. One day, he came home with a battery run mobile, which he hung over Zalmai’s crib. Little yellow and black bumblebees dangled from a sunflower, and they crinkled and squeaked when squeezed. A tune played when it was turned on (ATSS 288).

Rasheed preference to Zalmai and his bad treatment to female characters in the novel show how women are insignificant. They are considered as objects or mere commodities whom existence depends on serving and satisfying man in their family. When Nana insists that Mariam is valueless to Jalil, she asserts:

“What a stupid girl you are! You think you matter to him, that you’re wanted in his house? You think you’re a daughter to him? That he’s going to take you in? Let me tell you something—A man’s heart is a wretched, wretched thing, Mariam. It isn’t

like a mother's womb. It won't bleed, it won't stretch to make room for you. I'm the only one who loves you. I'm all you have in this world, Mariam, and when I'm gone you'll have nothing. You'll have nothing. You are nothing!" (17).

Through his narrative *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khalid Hossieni could successfully expose the image of male hegemony and women's subordination in afghan society. Mariam, Laila and Aziza are among the examples that show afghan women's inferior position to men as well as their oppression under patriarchal ideologies.

One of the key features of patriarchy is violence. It appears in many forms which harm women physically and psychologically. For instance, in a patriarchal society, men tend to refer to physical as well as verbal violence as a way to dominate women and keep them under their control (Istikomah, 56-57). However, sexual abuse is another apparent sort of violence which can be explained within gendered social relations. In attempting to define such a term, Alison Healicon maintains that:

within feminism, sexual violence encompasses rape, sexual assault, and childhood sexual abuse, but locating experience within structural and gendered inequalities demands the addition of a range of oppressive sexualized behavior such as 'forced marriage, sexual harassment and stalking, trafficking and sexual exploitation, crimes of honour and female genital mutilation" (Healicon, 4).

Accordingly, sexual violence operates within the complex power dynamics that legitimize women's violation. It includes practices that resort to power, control and domination.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini sheds light on rape as one type of sexual violence. In fact, it is considered as the worst type of violence where women are humiliated, ignored and dehumanized. The characters in the novel are victims to rape and marital rape. Nana is one of the female characters who is raped by Jalil, the businessman. As demonstrated in the novel "*Nana had been one of the housekeepers. Until her belly began to swell*" (ATSS, 6). As a housekeeper and a woman, Nana is in a very weak position which is seen as a great

opportunity to Jalil. In other words, Jalil is living in a misogynist society where all of the power is connected to men while women are marginalized and denied their rights. His rape to Nana results in the birth of Mariam the illegitimate child. Thinking of society and his honour, Jalil blames Nana as he abandons her and her child in the outskirts of Hirat. Nana tells Mariam:

“You know what he told his wives by way of defense? That I forced myself on him. That it was my fault. Did I? You see? This is what it means to be a woman in this world....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” (7).

In a patriarchal society, men are always right even if they do wrong and this is the case for Jalil. Although the mistake is not Nana’s only, yet she has to bear disgrace for the rest of her life. By that, she is not only abandoned by Jalil; her father disowns her out of shame as well. *“Nana's own father, who was a lowly stone carver in the nearby village of Gul Daman, disowned her. Disgraced, he packed his things and boarded a bus to Bran, never to be seen or heard from again”* (ATSS, 6).

Indeed, under patriarchal rule men are never blamed for the harm they cause to women. In fact they are permitted to further humiliate and marginalize the rape victim. In supporting the idea, Alison Healicon states that *“Hegemonic masculinity necessitates the subjugation of the other epitomized in sexual violence and becomes re-inscribed in practices that affirm and reproduce dehumanization of the ‘rape victim’”* (Healicon, 27).

Through the character Mariam, Hosseini demonstrates childhood rape. The female character is raped in an early age by her husband Rasheed. Hossieni describes Mariam’s dreadful experience encountering all sorts of bad feeling including losing her dignity.

Mariam began shivering...I can't, she croaked, looking at his moonlit profile, his thick shoulders and broad chest, the tufts of

grey hair protruding from his open collar...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 (ATSS, 44).

Hosseini goes further to portray Rasheed's hegemony forcing his sexual desires on his wives. Rasheed forces both Mariam and Laila to serve him regardless their state or circumstances. For Mariam, however, sexual intercourse in her marriage is mere laborious sessions that disgust her. She feels thankful to have such a chapter closed in her own life when Rasheed takes a second wife and forgets about her.

Sex, mercifully, was a closed chapter in her own life. It had been for some time, and now even the thought of those laborious sessions of lying beneath Rasheed made Mariam queasy in the gut (215).

The fact that Rasheed marries Laila and abandons Mariam because she failed to bear him a child exposes women's position in society. Women are not seen as companions or wives to men, instead, they are regarded as reproduction machines. Further, women are seen as male's property or simply as sexual objects.

In these accounts, sexual abuse is not only a dreadful experience to its victims; rather its impact leaves women emotionally and psychologically damaged. Such damage causes them to lose both their selves and identity. Therefore, in response to male hegemony, women behave differently in an attempt to escape oppression as well as violation.

4. Double Colonisation and the Quest for a Voice

It is deeply problematic to construct the Afghan women as someone in need of saving. If you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her to something. What violences are entailed in this transformation, and what presumptions are being made about the superiority of that to which you are saving her (Abou-Lughod, 2002:788-89)

It remains of crucial significance for third world writers to discuss the various ways in which women are constructed as doubly colonized. Henceforth, conflicting debates and questions about the act of saving third world women or speaking for them constitute a wide space of discussions among critics. Certainly, the overlap of patriarchal oppression and imperialism destabilizes the location of the female body as a bearer of meaning within her socio-political dimensions. In 1985, Spivak published her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” wherein she provides a critical analysis on how to read the subaltern woman who is caught under patriarchal, religious, political oppressions and colonial subjugation (Spivak, 102). This overlap of gendered oppressions results in the disappearance of the female figure and gives the male an upper hand in the social relations. In its core, the theory of Subalternity rejects any attempt to speak for the subaltern woman and urges her to speak in her own voice.

Thus, postcolonial feminist literature often portrays the female subaltern embarking on a spiritual and physical journey searching for strategies which would give meaning to her text. For instance, empowering the bonds of sisterhood; physical rage; female education; raising consciousness; immigration; seeking sanctuary; using speech and silence and acts of sacrifice are among the key strategies which would enable the subaltern voice to be heard or read. Therefore, we can conclude that double colonized women’s quest for a voice is a significant feature of postcolonial feminism.

A Thousand Splendid Suns captures the plight of afghan women as they experience patriarchal subordination and political coerciveness simultaneously throughout different eras in the afghan history. However, Hosseini seems to give much importance to the resilience and the “*surge of freedom awakening among the female characters*” (Imran, Farooq *et al.*, 99) as an attempt to challenge the stereotypical image of third world women bind by shared weaknesses and desperation for a western voice to speak for them. Nana, Mariam and Laila as female characters are shaped by intricate social realities, specific experiences and

influencing factors which makes each one of them draw her own, unique path towards her subaltern voice.

Hosseini's Nana is a representation of the muted subaltern who is banished from society for a sin she did not commit. Being a woman and of a lower rank implies that her utterances are unreliable; consequently, it gives the patriarchal society additional space to marginalize Nana's beliefs, judgements and testimonies. This is quite apparent when she accuses Jalil of raping her but he is easily able to escape culpability. This is what Nana tells Mariam to show her society's prejudice towards women like them: "*you know what he told his wives by way of defense? That I had forced myself on him. That it was my fault*" (ATSS, 6). However, the majority of people tend to believe that gender discrimination in third world societies is exerted exclusively by men. In fact, there are other factors interfering in keeping similar practices alive, most significantly, women's acceptance. As Bell Hooks argues, victims of sexism, exploitation and male dominance are often conditioned to behave "*in complicity*" with patriarchal ideology (Hooks, 43). In many occasions, Nana explicitly expresses her approval to society's injustices towards her by admitting her powerlessness and self-loathing, "*I (Nana) wish my father had had the stomach to sharpen one of his knives and do the honorable thing, it might have been better for me*" (ATSS, 6). Nana's overwhelming sense of powerlessness and self-exile reinforces her status as an object of the patriarchal society.

In addition, Hosseini describes how the political institutions aggressively marginalize and erase the subaltern female from historical and social records. Nana's account of the day she gave birth to Mariam reveals the reality of lower class women being excluded from health care services. Nana is thus "*doubly in shadow*" (Spivak, 84) compared to her male counterpart and other women from upper social classes. This social gap contributes immensely to her voicelessness.

She lay all alone on the *kolba*⁴ floor, a knife by her side, sweat drenching her body: “When the pain got bad, I’d bite on a pillow and scream into it until I was hoarse. And still no one came to give me a drink of water...I cut the cord between us myself. That’s why I had the knife” (ATSS, 11).

Moreover, the passive attitude towards oppression has roots in educational deprivation. Indeed, education strengthens one’s own identity and builds one’s own consciousness. Being an illiterate woman, Nana’s uninformed beliefs have a destructive impact on Mariam’s outlook on life and often limits her space to express her desires. Indeed, all these social and political factors render Nana’s attitude towards oppression extremely polarising; occasionally she gets too passive, other times she turns brutally violent. As a matter of fact, her lack of education prevents her from altering her anger and frustration into a meaningful resistance. Instead, she allows patriarchal ideology to seep deeply into her mind until she becomes unable to speak; unable to produce a meaningful text and challenge the rigid social structure. Thus Nana resolves to suicide as a finale act to reclaim her autonomy, “*to speak out, to get a voice, to be a text of her own*” (Kasic, 2012:2). A closer examination reveals that her suicide comes as an inevitable outcome to her inability to access hegemony and upgrade her status. However, Nurul Istikomah believes that Nana’s suicide; though committed in extreme desperation, fails to give her voice meaning since suicide is a form of “*self-destruction*” which can be also perceived as an “*acceptance towards discrimination*” (93).

Undeniably, the strong bond in sisterhood as well as motherhood appears to be a significant aspect in Hosseini’s representation of the subaltern voice. Laila and Mariam as subalterns are well aware of the prestigious aura that comes with being a mother, and that makes them strive to achieve that status. Ultimately, their shared struggle leads them to develop a unique mother-daughter relationship which would later on grant them the courage to fight back against their tyrannical husband. Eventually rendering their muted voices heard.

⁴ Kolba is a small hut or shelter, usually made of crude materials like mud.

Without a doubt, adhering to these gender roles can be perceived by some as a “*surrender to patriarchal pressures imposed on women*” (Rabbani & Chaudhury 35). However, that is not the case for the female protagonists in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* especially after witnessing one another’s suffering.

Mariam and Laila’s firm struggle to become mothers demonstrates the significance of motherhood in the formation of their female identity. What’s more, motherhood becomes a key factor which surges the female protagonists’ resistance to patriarchal oppression and domestic tyranny; particularly Laila who grew up in a home where “*no one has ever done something (violence) like that*” (ATSS, 305). Is it worth noting that Mariam at first could not digest the fact that her position within the household is quickly replaced by Laila; the young and beautiful girl. However, Mariam’s attitude with Laila shifts radically the moment she develops empathy towards her miserable conditions. Asma Arshi describes the character of Mariam as “*altruistic, self-sacrificial...She is a character who becomes a role model for the reader because of her devotion and sacrifice for the people she loves*” (qtd. in Andrew, 42). Indeed, Mariam and Laila’s account of struggle is more redeeming because together they succeed to find solace and sanctuary in each other’s bitter life experiences.

Laila is raised by an educated father who has struggled to secure a life of equal opportunities for her. When the war between the Mujahedeen and the Soviets reached its peak, Hakim asked Laila to stay at home for her safety. Because he is deeply aware of his daughter’s dream to become a teacher, Hakim took it upon himself to home-school her. According to him, girls’ education is a key factor in building a strong afghan society.

He took over the teaching duties himself. Laila went into his study every day after sundown, and as Hekmatayar launched his rockets at Massoud from the southern outskirts of the city, Babi and she discussed *the ghazals* of Hafez and the works of the beloved Afghan poet Ustad Khaliluallah Khalili. Babi taught her to derive the quadratic equation, showed her how to factor

polynomials and plot parametric curves...Laila pictured him as he must have been once, erasing his blackboard with graceful swipes, looking over a student's shoulder, fatherly and attentive (ATSS, 160)

Laila's consciousness flourishes from her education and thus it qualifies her character to be a modern archetype of heroism because she succeeds in raising Mariam's consciousness to embark in a journey from "*oppression to freedom*" (Andrews, 55). Unlike Mariam, Laila is aware of herself being discriminated against under the oppressive marriage to Rasheed. At the onset, Laila coerced by Rasheed to marrying him after he takes advantage of the political chaos and fakes the news of Tariq's death. However, Laila's manipulative nature and intelligence makes her aware of the necessity of seizing the opportunity and accepts to marry him just to give a name to her unborn child and secure her life. Laila's experience of motherhood becomes more violent when she gives birth to a girl instead of a boy. She is then forced to witness her daughter Aziza being discriminated against by Rasheed who demands that the girl be sent to an orphanage. He tells Laila to "*put that thing (Aziza) in a box and let her float down Kabul river*" (ATSS, 212).

When it comes to her daughter, Laila does not keep her voice down as she purposefully did in her early days of marriage. Her courage and strength of will are further reflected in her unwavering defiance to Taliban's restrictions by repeatedly venturing outside to visit her in the orphanage. For Aziza, Laila risks herself getting caught wandering around with no male companion. Sometimes, Laila and Mariam tend to wear multi-layered burqas before heading outside to shield themselves from Taliban's "*tongue lashing, or a single kick to the rear...Other times, she met with assortments of wooden clubs, fresh tree branches, short whips, slaps, often fists*" (ATSS, 313). Interestingly, the same piece of garment that used to suffocate Laila and provides Mariam with a false sense of shelter in the beginning of the novel is now an effective tool of protection from bodily injury. Not only that, the burqa

serves as a tool of liberation for Mariam and Laila since it allows them to maintain a level of anonymity while moving around in the streets of Kabul.

Likewise, Mariam's seven miscarriages prevent her from becoming the desired *sati* or *good wife* in the eyes of her husband and society. Her inability to experience motherhood contributes greatly to her passive silence and obedience. Fortunately, Mariam's life changes dramatically when Laila enters her life. Laila not only raises Mariam's consciousness concerning gender equality and freedom, but also grants her the chance to experience motherhood by becoming like a daughter to her. In this way, Laila becomes a good reason and a driving force for Mariam to eventually speak up against oppression; even to sacrifice her life for the sake of Laila's safety.

Living under the same roof and enslaved by the same master, Laila's brave attitude towards Rasheed's tyranny empowers Mariam and leads her to the awareness she lacked ever since she was born. At some point in the novel, Mariam is left in awe while Laila "*lurched at him. She grabbed his arm with both hands and tried to drag him down...She did succeed in slowing Rasheed's progress toward Mariam*" (ATSS, 216). As a matter of fact, Laila cannot bear living in the confinement of Rasheed's house and craves to run away from it. As an intellectual, Laila believes in the necessity to act in order to change her situation. The following quotation shows Laila's firm determination to run away from Rasheed's grip, "*We're leaving this spring, Aziza and I. Come with us, Mariam*" (ATSS, 256). Together they defy Taliban's restrictions on women's mobility and take on a journey to neighbouring Pakistan searching for a safe haven where they hopefully can belong. Before doing so, Laila steals money from Rasheed, pack the bags while he is asleep or at work.

Mariam was in the doorway. Laila could tell that she hadn't slept either. She wondered if Mariam too has been seized all night by bouts of euphoria and attacks of mouth drying anxiety. "We'll leave in half an hour" Laila said (ATSS 251).

Their plan is not successful for they soon get arrested by Taliban members and are returned to an even greater violence and death threats from Rasheed, “*you try this again and i will find you and when I do, there isn’t a court in this forsaken country can that will hold me accountable for what I will do*” (ATSS, 272). The indifference of political and legal institutions towards Mariam and Laila’s wretched conditions does not make them lose hope; it rather strengthens their bond to continue fighting for their lives.

Chandra Mohanty asserts that what really binds third world women together is not their shared powerlessness and inherited inferiority as it is portrayed in western representations, rather it is the “*sociological notion of the ‘sameness’ of their oppression*” that strengthens their bond and escorts them towards breaking the silence casted upon them (337).

Laila didn’t see the punch coming. One moment she was talking and the next she was on all four, wide-eyed and red red-faced, trying to draw a breath. It was as if a car had hit her at full speed...(Laila) watched him (Rasheed) shove Mariam into a tool shed. He went in, and came out with a hammer and several long planks of wood. He shut the double doors to the shed, took a key from his pockets, worked the padlock (ATSS, 268-9).

Only after witnessing Rasheed’s vicious abuses towards Laila, Mariam could at last transcend her sense of powerlessness. Only then Mariam truly understands the power of self-sacrifice to protect a loved one; the significance of giving her subaltern *text a meaning*. Mariam “*who never shows any sign of rebellion against Rasheed and his barbarous beating, gained courage to fight back and ultimately kill Rasheed*” before he takes Laila’s life for lying to him about her past relationship with Tariq (Philip, 797). Through Mariam’s courageous act to kill Rasheed, Hosseini captures how unconditional love and sacrifice can draw an end to a history of suffering. Indeed, the compassion and the unequalled love she receives from Laila and her children offer Mariam the opportunity to stand up for herself and pick up the scattered pieces of her subjectivity. At that moment, Mariam becomes fully willing to commit

the most horrendous crimes in the eyes of society and religion; even to kill, in order to preserve those earnest emotions.

Mariam steadied her feet and tightened her grip around the shovel's handle. She raised it. She said his name. She wanted him to see...She hit him across the temple. The blow knocked him off Laila...she turned it so the sharp edge was vertical, and, as she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time she was deciding the course of her own life. And, with that, Mariam brought down the shovel. This time, she gave it everything she had (ATSS, 347-8).

Mariam is wholeheartedly convinced that the system that subjugated women like her for centuries would never grant her forgiveness, even if her crime is committed in self-defence. Despite the fact that her journey towards liberation ends with her death sentence, Mariam does not feel any regret because she knows that her courage and selflessness are enough to ensure Laila the freedom she aspires to. It is reflected in her calm temperament that her mind is finally at peace. Interestingly, Mariam's fully conscious decision to welcome her fate with an open heart marks her successful completion of the last phase in her transformation.

Eventually, Mariam's broken body proves to be more than just a repository of painful memories; it is rather a liberating force and a medium through which Laila is able to retrieve her muted voice. Prior to her public execution, Mariam gained momentous popularity during her short service at women's prison as the heroine who could defeat patriarchal oppression. Hosseini narrates: *"the women eyed her with reverent, almost awestruck, expression. They offered her their blankets. They competed to share their food with her"* (ATSS, 354). Indeed, double colonized women are unable to escape bondage because their simplest act of resistance is met with further cruelty and oppression. As mentioned, Mariam's inmates seem to profoundly identify with her struggle because the majority of them are imprisoned for crimes that are far less violent than killing such as attempts at *"running away from home"* (ATSS, 354). In this regard, one may argue that Spivak's most controversial phrase *"the*

subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak, 104) exceeds its literal meaning to imply that it is the hegemony that actually refuses to read and listen to subaltern voice.

5. “Caged” Birds in Their Sanctuary

A Thousand Splendid Suns narrates the story of the subaltern female subject. It scrutinizes the struggle of afghan women to survive in a patriarchal society and under the dominant rule of Taliban. The novel focuses on the characters Mariam and Laila. It portrays how their lives intersect and their fates intertwine creating a strong female bond. Such strong bonding highlights the relationship between women as it provides a deep meaning to sisterhood (Dwivedi, 20). Indeed, women bond to reclaim their voices and rights that are lost under patriarchal culture. Bell Hook states that “*Feminist sisterhood is rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no matter the form that injustice takes. Political solidarity between women always undermines sexism and sets the stage for the overthrow of patriarchy*” (Hooks, 15).

Khaled Hosseini begins his novel with narrating the story of Mariam, the illegitimate child, living in the outskirts of Hirat. Mariam spends her childhood with her mother, Nana, in a small Kolba. As a child, she has to endure her mother’s swinging moods and stern manner. In fact, Nana’s austerity is the result of her constant rejection. When she is pregnant with Jalil’s child, she is first rejected by him then by her father. Eventually she is isolated in a remote place behind the borders of Gul Damen. Despite her deep emotions to Mariam, Nana is unable to express any of that. It is because she has little knowledge about the sense of security, comfort and affection that a mother must offer to her children. However, her concern and fear that Mariam has left her to start a new life with Jalil makes her commit suicide. The latter suggests that Nana only finds relief being with her daughter. In the novel, Nana begs Mariam not to leave and stay with her, she says:

“Don’t leave me, Mariam jo. Please stay. I’ll die if you go.”
Mariam said nothing.
“You know I love you, Mariam jo” (ATSS, 26).

Dreadfully, Mariam never listens to her mother. And yet when she is back from her visit to her father “*Mariam caught a glimpse of what was beneath the tree: the straight-backed chair, overturned. The rope dropping from a high branch. Nana dangling at the end of it*” (ATSS, 34). Only then Mariam realizes that she is the only person Nana finds solace in and lives for. She remembers Nana saying “*I’m all you have in this world, Mariam, and when I’m gone you’ll have nothing. You’ll have nothing. You are nothing!*”(ATSS, 26).

Indeed, Mariam’s ignorance to Nana’s words telling her not to trust men costs her so much in life. “*She gave herself over to the new life that awaited her in this city, a life with a father, with sisters and brothers, a life in which she would love and be loved back, without reservation or agenda, without shame*” (ATSS, 29). This fantasized life deprives her from all the precious things that belong to her including her mother, her childhood, the people who cares about her, and her home in Herat. Mariam awakens from her dream the moment she sees her father’s face in the upstairs window leaving her sleep outside his house all night. “*She was ashamed of how she had dismissed her mother's stricken looks, her puffy eyes. Nana, who had warned her, who had been right all along*” (ATSS, 33).

After her mother’s death, Mariam is forced to marry a suitor from Kabul. Throughout her marriage to Rasheed, she suffers deprivation and violation. The fact that she is unable to bear children makes Rasheed grow brutal, heating and insulting her. Mariam tries hard to serve and please him, yet all what she receives is “*his scorn, his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat. Mariam saw clearly how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid. She lived in fear of his volatile temperament, his punches, slaps, [and] kicks*” (ATSS, 89). Rasheed goes further in ignoring Mariam and takes a second wife. Unlike Mariam, Laila is fortunate to have a father who is a teacher; therefore, her life is

different to that of Mariam. Laila is clever and educated. As a child, she attends school and enjoys having friends. Indeed, these women are from different backgrounds, yet their lives come together. Both of them are forced to marry Rasheed and suffer the same miserable life under his tyranny. However, what brings them together is the oppression they share. The two women find comfort and support in each other. Eventually, their relationship becomes strong forming a powerful sisterhood bond.

Laila brings change to Mariam's life. After the birth of Aziza, her child, Mariam feels blessed to have the little girl so close to her. It is the first time for Mariam to be loved and wanted that much.

Mariam had never before been wanted like this. Love had never been declared to her so guilelessly, so unreservedly. ... She marvelled at how, after all these years . . . she had found in this little creature the first true connection in her life of false, failed connections (ATSS, 226).

It is quite remarkable that in gaining support and strength from each other, Mariam and Laila develop new personalities. They are able to take control over their lives and fight against domestic violence. In the novel, when Rasheed asks Aziza to be a street bagger, Laila opposes to the idea. Rasheed slaps her for doing so but Laila takes her turn in punching him as well. *"Then Laila punched him. It was the first time she'd struck anybody, discounting the playful punches she and Tariq used to trade... It made a sound like dropping a rice bag to the floor. She hit him hard. The impact actually made him stagger two steps backward"* (ATSS, 292).

In fact, the bond between Mariam and Laila is as strong as that between mother and daughter. These women find refuge in each other. They are together in their struggle against patriarchal system imposed by Taliban. Their friendship provides them with the strength to endure the brutality of such hegemonic system. In Mariam, Laila finds not only maternal

support to raise her children, but all the love a mother could offer to her family. Indeed, it is this great love that pushes Mariam to take a decisive action to kill Rasheed as he is in the act of murdering Laila. *"He's going to kill her, she thought. He really means to. And Mariam could not, would not allow that to happen. He'd taken so much from her in the twenty-seven years of marriage. She would not watch him take Laila too"* (ATSS, 340). As she is about to kill him, Mariam wants him to see her and realizes the much of sacrifice and exertion she has gone through living with him.

She said his name. She wanted him to see.
"Rasheed".
He looked up.
Mariam swung.
She hit him across the temple. The blow knocked him off Laila
(ATSS, 348).

The act of saving Laila releases Mariam from all the fear she had lived throughout her life. It is the first time for her to make a decision of what she wants. *"Mariam raised the shovel high. ... 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"* (ATSS, 384).

In order to secure a bright future to Laila and her children, Mariam sacrifices her own life. Such an act is significantly a brave one. Mariam is sure about what she wants as she doesn't regret leading her life to an end. Her action reflects what a mother would always want to do for her beloved ones. Mariam came to the world as a *harami*, yet all what she wants is to leave it *"as a woman who had loved and been loved back. ... This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings"* (ATSS, 329).

The sanctuary these women find in each other helps them escape oppression and Rasheed's cruelty. Indeed, Mariam has left the world but the great love and the beautiful memories she left within Laila will always remain. *"Laila sees ... that Mariam is never far. She is here, in these walls they've repainted, in the trees they've planted, in the blankets that keep the*

children warm, in these pillows and books and pencils. She is in the children's laughter"
(ATSS, 366).

CONCLUSION

The present research explored patriarchy and gender stereotyping in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It employed the postcolonial feminist theory of 'subalternity' brought by Gayatri Spivak to examine different contexts and structures that contribute to the dehumanization and degradation of the female subject in the Afghanistan. Thus analysing Hosseini's novel in the light of this theory brings insight into diverse life experiences of afghan women in the midst of overlapping patriarchal oppressions. The socio-historical context in which this literary work is produced reveals that gender roles within the afghan society are predominantly prone to cultural, social and political dimensions. Indeed, the sweeping patriarchal ideology which governs the different aspects of social relations offers a fertile ground for gender discrimination. By focusing mainly on the plight of Mariam, Laila and Nana as subalterns, this dissertation unveiled the truth concerning the position of women under the combined oppressions of hegemonic masculinity and gender stereotypes.

Postcolonial feminist writers attempt to restore the marginalized historiography of third world women through their authentic portrayal of the prevalent cultural heterogeneity and its influence on gender relations. For Hosseini, it is of crucial significance to shed light on the diverse cultural experiences of afghan women in order to identify their status. In other words, Hosseini rejects the western representation of afghan women as a '*homogeneous group*' bind by permanent '*weaknesses*' and '*oppressions*'. This is evident in his portrayal of Laila, the free spirited women whose liberal upbringing, education and consciousness reinforces her desire to rebel against the rigid gender stereotypes society ascribes for her. As mentioned in earlier discussions, Laila was not born into subalternity rather she was forced into it by circumstance. Mariam and Nana on the other hand cannot detach themselves from their

cultural roots because the repressive environment in which they grew up teaches women to be passive rather than rebellious.

In addition, the novelist plainly expresses his sense of discomfort towards the cultural traditions that he deems as damaging rather than beneficial to the overall progress of his country. Hence, this dissertation examined the overlapping religious, social and traditional codes such as honour, shame, reputation, chastity and how they are manipulated by hegemonic powers for the sake of exiling the female body and mystify its expressions. For instance, any manifestation of sexuality outside of marriage alienates and exiles the female subject from her surroundings. In addition, rejecting a forced marriage is often perceived as 'betrayal' to native culture. Most importantly, failing to deliver a male heir to carry the family's name subject women to a verity of violations such as corporal, sexual and psychological abuse. Therefore, this study demonstrated the various tools of resistance adopted by female characters in addition to their attitudes towards oppression. The female protagonists exhibited conflicting attitudes ranging from passive endurance to self-degradation, inferiority complex, guilt, sacrifice, self-exile, rising female consciousness, physical rage, female bonding, silence and even suicide.

A Thousand Splendid Suns highlights the role of women under the fundamentalist Islamist ideology. In this regard, Hosseini pays extra attention to the way in which hegemonic masculinity represented by Taliban regime misinterpret religious texts in order to construct the role of women as the '*citadel*' of religious beliefs. Thus, women are turned to object of surveillance and protection whereas men are projected as the 'protectors' who protect women and the sacred notions attached to their bodies. Moreover, this chauvinistic ideology endorses fundamentalist ideals of '*wifehood*', '*womanhood*', and '*motherhood*' as the norm within the family dynamic. As a consequence, women are obliged to wear the burqa and behave in a way that is socially and culturally acceptable. Undeniably, the process of veiling and

unveiling of the female body triggers baffling debates within postcolonial feminism. While some scholars argue that the Islamic veil threatens the individuality and subjectivity of women, others affirm that it can operate as a tool of resistance against western feminist assumptions. Through such characters as Laila and Mariam, Hosseini draws attention to the significance of developing female consciousness in regards to the practice of wearing the veil.

Within predominantly patriarchal societies such as the afghan society, power operates on the principle of gender as culturally constructed rather than on the basis of biology. In plain words, men's attitudes, behaviours, utterances, gestures and dress codes are associated with notions of power whereas women's expected expressions, behaviours and attitudes are associated with notions of weakness and docility. Indeed, this dichotomy is considered as the root of gender discrimination within a society. For instance, boys are preferred than girls. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the plight of afghan women as victims of male hegemony. Captivatingly, it draws attention to the way in which women are made accomplice in the prejudice and marginalization of their own sex. This is evident early in the novel with Nana's repetitive verbal abuses toward her own child Mariam.

With the country's sweeping into chaos and militarization, the female protagonists are situated at the core of both patriarchal and colonial discourses in which they are denied the opportunity to express their desire. More to the point, silence and obedience are endorsed by hegemonic powers; namely Taliban regime, as essential components in the construction of their female identity. Certainly, Hosseini as an indigenous writer longs to return to the peaceful era in the afghan history when women enjoyed equal rights to go school and have full access to social facilities. Indeed, education and freedom of mobility do increase women's chances at hegemony and sovereignty. While reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns*,

one could sense the author's urgency and necessity in reclaiming, celebrating and acknowledging the female body and voice.

The issues and themes tackled in this dissertation divulge that a thorough study of gender would not be fully realized without inspecting the politics of the female body. Interestingly, Hosseini's representation of the afghan female body elucidates that this bordered whole is more than just a place of negation as portrayed in western representations. The female body in Hosseini's text has the ability to transform into a zone of liberation and sanctuary for the weak and the oppressed. It manifests perfectly in the reactions of Laila and Mariam whenever Rasheed's toxic masculinity threatens their unity and mother-daughter bonding. Hence, this portrayal can be read as Hosseini's contribution to the deconstruction of stereotypical notions attached to women in the third world.

In addition, the female voice happens to be of paramount significance to postcolonial feminist writers. The remarkable journey of Laila and Mariam from passive silence to resilient rebellion can be considered as the novelist's genuine attempt to re-draw the human face of third world women; the face that has been lost within the essentialist, ethnocentric western representations. Though their female bonding, selflessness, sacrifice, consciousness and courage, Laila and Mariam could overcome the barriers and limitations of gender. Eventually they emerge as victorious heroines.

It can be concluded that the power of Laila and Mariam's story lies in its ability to transcend geographical location to reflect a reality experienced by the majority of women in postcolonial societies; however, each woman is bound to her specific circumstance, dependency, strengths and weaknesses. In fact, what epitomizes postcolonial feminism the most is its tendency to offer scholars and researchers the necessary tools to reach out to every single woman and shed light on their diverse accounts of oppression and liberation.

All in all, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* narrates a journey that starts with patriarchal domination and gendered violence however ends as a moving account of courage and meaningful resistance. Although each character stood against prejudice and gender stereotyping in her own way, the empowerment Laila and Mariam gain in each other's sanctuary eliminate a long history of bondage and marginalization. Indeed, 'resistance' as a salient facet of postcolonial feminism becomes a marker in Laila and Mariam's identity formation.

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ملخص

يوصل الرابط بين "إيديولوجية السلطة الأبوية" و "الأدوار الجنسانية" في العالم الثالث إثارة فضول الباحثين وتأجيج النقاشات المتضاربة ضمن نطاق الدراسات "النسوية لما بعد الكولونيالية". وبالتالي يعالج موضوع البحث الحالي معاناة المرأة الأفغانية في رواية "ألف شمس مشرقة" لمؤلفها "خالد حسيني" في خضم الاضطهاد الناتج عن تداخل تعسفات "الذكورة المهيمنة" علاوة على التطلعات الثقافية والاجتماعية فيما يخص دور المرأة في مجتمعها. تكشف رواية حسيني عقود من العنف والحرمان حيث يفرض على الأنثى تبوأ موضع "الآخر" في مختلف اطر العلاقات الاجتماعية. وتهدف هذه الدراسة بشكل أساسي إلي إظهار الدور الجلل الذي تلعبه مختلف الأبعاد الاجتماعية و الثقافية و السياسية في بناء "الأدوار الجنسانية" في الرواية المختارة. لذلك يسعى الباحثون إلى تحليل رواية حسيني في ضوء نظرية "التابع" لما بعد الكولونيالية النسوية "السيفاك". يتناول الفصل الأول من البحث السياق السوسيولوجي التاريخي بالإضافة إلى الإطار النظري للبحث. أما الفصل الثاني فيناقش دور "القضايا الجنسانية" و "الهيمنة الذكورية" في عزل وتغريب الجسد الأنثوي في رواية "ألف شمس مشرقة". كما يسلط هذا الفصل الضوء عل تصوير الكاتب "لصوت التابع" والأساليب الأنثوية المتنوعة "للمقاومة". بإيجاز البحث يهدف لإبراز دور الإيديولوجية في نشوء "القوالب النمطية الجنسانية" في المجتمع الأفغاني.

Resumé

Le lien entre l'idéologie patriarcale et les rôles de genre dans le tiers monde continue d'agiter les érudits et de susciter des débats conflictuels dans le domaine du féminisme postcolonial. La présente étude s'intéresse donc au sort des femmes de « Mille Soleils Splendides » de Khaled Hosseini au milieu des oppressions qui se chevauchent de la masculinité hégémonique ainsi que des attentes culturelles et sociales. Le récit d'Hosseini expose des décennies de violence et de privation dans lesquelles le sujet féminin est construit comme un « autre ». Par conséquent, l'objectif principal de cette étude est de démontrer l'impact puissant des dimensions sociales, culturelles et politiques sur la construction de rôles de genre dans le corpus sélectionné. Pour atteindre cet objectif, l'étude s'efforce d'analyser le roman d'Hosseini à la lumière de la théorie féministe postcoloniale de Spivak sur la « subalternité » . Le premier chapitre est consacré au contexte socio-historique et au cadre théorique. Le deuxième chapitre examine en quoi les politiques du genre et du patriarcat aliènent le corps féminin dans « Mille Soleils Splendides ». Il met en lumière la représentation de la voix subalterne par le romancier et les divers outils de la résistance féminine. En résumé, cette recherche met en évidence le rôle de l'idéologie dans l'émergence de stéréotypes de genre dans la société afghane.