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UNDOING SUBALTERNITY IN NADIA HASHIMI'S *THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL* AND KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

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UNDOING SUBALTERNITY IN NADIA HASHIMI'S *THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL* AND KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

(Yüksek Lisans Tezi)

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Hadisa KABIRI, Kayseri, 2023

NADİA HASHİMİ'NİN *KABUĞUNU KIRAN İNCİ* VE KHALED HOSSEİNİ'NİN *BİN MUHTEŞEM GÜNEŞ* ESERLERİNDE MADUNLUĞUN DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

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ÖZET

Modern Afgan yazar Khaled Hosseini, romanlarında özellikle kadınları etkileyen sosyal, politik ve kültürel konuları ele alır. Hosseini'nin romanları 70'ten fazla dile çevrilmiş ve dünya çapında 40 milyondan fazla satmıştır. Hosseini, Afganistan'da büyümüş ve bu nedenle ülkeye ve kadınlarına olan hayranlığı muhtemelen oradaki kendi deneyimlerine dayanmaktadır. *Bin Muhteşem Güneş* eseri çok çeşitli eleştirel incelemelere konu olmuştur. Nadia Hashimi'nin *Kabuğunu Kıran İnci*'si hem üslup hem de konu bakımından Khalid Hosseini'nin eserlerine benzemektedir. Hem Hashimi hem de Hosseini göçün acısını yaşamışlardır, ancak Hashimi daha önce Batı'ya yerleşmiş ve hayatının büyük bölümünü orada geçirmiştir. Her iki yazarın da eserleri, kadınların hikayelerini ve acılarını tarihi olaylarla birleştirdikleri için önemlidir ve farklı tarihsel dönemlerdeki kadınların yaşamlarını incelemektedir. Ataerkil şiddet ve kabul edilemez kültürlerin kadınlara dayatılması gibi benzer temalar her iki kitapta da bulunabilir. Her iki roman da bu tezde madun teorisi merceğinden incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Khaled Hosseini, Nadia Hashimi, *Bin Muhteşem Güneş*, *Kabuğunu Kıran İnci*, Madun.

UNDOING SUBALTERNITY IN NADIA HASHIMI'S *THE PEARL THAT BROKE ITS SHELL* AND KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

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ABSTRACT

Modern Afghan author Khaled Hosseini addresses social, political, and cultural issues, especially those affecting women, in his fiction. Hosseini's novels have been translated into more than 70 languages and have sold more than 40 million copies around the world. Hosseini grew up in Afghanistan, so his fascination with the country and its women is probably grounded in his own experiences there. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has been the subject of a wide range of critical examinations. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi is similar to works by Khalid Hosseini in both style and subject matter. Both Hashimi and Hosseini experienced the bitterness of migration, although Hashimi left for the West first and lived there for the bulk of her life. Their writings are significant because they combine the tales and sorrows of women with historical events. The works of both authors examine the lives of women in different historical eras. Similar themes of patriarchal violence and the imposition of unsavoury cultures on women can be found in both books. Both novels are analysed in this thesis through the lens of subaltern theory.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, Nadia Hashimi, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, The *Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Subaltern.

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INTRODUCTION

As a starting point, this study asks whether or not the voices of subalterns can be accurately reflected in the critical discourse of history, sociology, culture, and literature. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak asked this in one of the most seminal writings of the humanities in the second half of the 20th century. Since "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985) was published, a diverse range of literary theorists, including Spivak herself, have investigated the consequences and shadow presence of this question in literary criticism, especially comparative studies of world literature. Subalternity in Afghanistan is a complicated topic with many causes; nonetheless, the subalternity examined here has nothing to do with post-colonial theory and is instead grounded in an attempt to provide a dynamic interpretation of the lives of Afghan women. In contrast to earlier studies, this one examines the word "subaltern" from a variety of angles, including its historical, cultural, and religious connotations as well as their consequences on the lives of Afghan women.

Two books written on Afghan women have been analysed to shed light on the problem: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadia Hashimi. This thesis compares the male and female narratives on Afghan women by considering how the two sexes interpret the lives of Afghan women. Because most of their works focus on cultural and social concerns, patriarchy, and violence against women in Afghan culture, these two writers may be regarded as among the most prominent authors who explore women's lives from various eras of history through diverse lenses. Relationships between spouses, lovers, children, grandchildren, and siblings are common themes in the works of Nadia Hashimi and Khaled Hosseini. The

majority of the protagonists in these two writers' works are women, and they all face some kind of oppression.

Spivak's idea of subalternity is the theoretical lens through which this study seeks to examine the subaltern social and religious status of Afghan women. It also shows how women may overcome oppression and utilise their subjugated bodies to create a vision of women's liberation. The two tales' female protagonists are used as case studies to examine the idea of subalternity. It's important to notice that the narrative scenes in both tales switch personalities midway through. However, the central concern is the unresolved question of whether or not the stories' protagonists ever feel inferior. An overview of pivotal studies of women in Afghanistan is provided to shed light on the central questions of how the female protagonists of these stories respond to the stereotypes others hold about them and what strategies they employ to assimilate into the new culture.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter deals with the issue of being a woman in Afghanistan by focusing on patriarchy, forced marriage, bacha posh, domestic violence, and Pashtunwali. In the second chapter, Spivak’s subaltern is applied to the Afghan context. The third chapter is devoted to the life of Nadia Hashimi and her novel, while the fourth one deals with the life of Khaled Hosseini and his novels. Chapter five discusses both novels, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in terms of subaltern theory.

This research is significant because it discusses the intertwining of Afghan history, politics, and the patriarchal cultural norms and customs that are so evident in the two novels under discussion. These books are narrated from a female perspective, and they cover a wide range of issues and hardships experienced by Afghan women throughout the country's history. On the other hand, the importance of this conclusion lies in the fact that the selected novels are multi-dimensional and multi-voiced narratives. Although the female characters in both stories live inside four walls and a closed environment, the narratives are completely open, and the space is vast. Important events that happened outside are narrated and linked with the inner space where women live. For this reason, the feeling of being limited by time, place, and characters does not arise, and a general study of the life of women in Afghanistan is obtained on the path of

history. The novels are significant because they feature the perspectives of women on social, cultural, and political oppressions. Therefore, this study can be a light to discover hidden truths behind the ruling traditions in Afghanistan, which have kept women in complete darkness.

CHAPTER ONE

BEING A WOMAN IN AFGHANISTAN

1.1. Patriarchy

While gender inequality is structured and settled in many social sectors, women's experience of inequality in the two main spheres of daily life, namely the family and the public sphere, is often the same. The patriarchal system tries to define a woman's place at the intersection of home and family in an apparently human way so that she does not realize her ideological control in the struggle between private and public spheres. Patriarchal culture includes beliefs about the nature of man, woman, and humanity, as well as masculinity associated with the human type and femininity associated with a marginal position of the other. Similarly, if we delve deeper into patriarchal culture, we will see a complex web of ideas that define reality and what is good and desirable. The inevitable consequence of patriarchy is ignoring women, which takes different forms. Since patriarchy is perpetuated through the process of social and cultural institutionalization and in the same way it is legitimized in society through economic, legal and political systems, these lead women to internalize patriarchal ways of thinking in their values and behaviour.[1] Therefore, women do not become a part of this system or out of it only by their own choice; It is a complex system with an interweaving of factors such as sex, gender, class, caste, ethnicity, and race, all of which limit women.

Throughout Afghanistan's history, patriarchy has been both prevalent and marginalised. Women have been impacted by this problem throughout history, from the time of the country's royal regimes until the present day, when the system is in the hands of the

[1] Gwen Hunnicutt, "Varieties of Patriarchy and Violence Against Women: Resurrecting 'Patriarchy' as a Theoretical Tool," *Violence Against Women* 15, no. 5, 555.

Taliban. Although patriarchy in Afghanistan has been there for generations, it was not until the kingdom period of Nader Shah that the first oppressions against women were instituted, such as the suppression of girls' schools. In regard to women, the decree states, "I returned the hijab or optional covering that (the previous king) mandated, I stopped adult women and girls from leaving without the consent of their spouses and guardians,", and in another paragraph, it is mentioned that the Mastorat school was suspended.[2] Mastorat School was the only girls' school that provided education to women, but later, by the order of the head of the government at that time, women were deprived of education for several years. However, the truth is that women have experienced the most damage in the last twenty years more than ever before. The laws proposed by the Taliban in Afghanistan show the intensity of patriarchy in this country. An example of this can be the closing of girls' schools to the female class and assigning education only to men. In the history of Afghanistan, arbitrary policies of traditional fundamentalism, which originated from the ruling tribal culture in the country, have done the most oppression in the name of religion and the implementation of religious rules in the field of women.

This segment of Afghan society, influenced by tribal customs and the Pashtunwali heritage, is continually expanding its cultural footprint. This group instituted and strictly enforced anti-feminist laws from the moment they set foot in the country. The Taliban's regulations are not based on human teachings but rather on the superstitious rituals and exclusive social structure in which they were raised and trained. The fundamental beliefs and practises of the Taliban and other dominant extremist organisations are based on simplistic and dehumanising stereotypes about women. The strict orders of the Taliban for women are not a new issue because the Taliban had applied the same rules to women in their first term of government and they are still following the same rules today. During the early years of Taliban control, a group known as Amr Bil Marrouf was tasked with spreading strict restrictions to women throughout the nation by going from alley to alley. Now, like in the early days, the committee that was responsible for

[2] Mundayat Meera and Khatera Yekta, “The Challenges to Political Participation of Women in Afghanistan: Historical and Cultural Perspectives,” *Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 65–91, https://doi.org/10.4312/as.2021.9.1.65-91.

supervising and controlling women's clothes has resumed its duties. According to the new decree of this women's clothing committee, it is as follows:

- *Afghan women must cover themselves from head to toe and not a strand of their hair should be seen.*
- *It is prohibited for women to wear coloured clothes in public.*
- *It is forbidden for women to wear high-heeled shoes.*
- *Nail polish for women is prohibited.*
- *It is mandatory for women to wear a burqa, and if they do not have a burqa, it is recommended for women to wear black and stretchy hijabs and their faces are also should covered with a piece and black glasses*.[3]

They also imposed strange restrictions in the markets and announced that the sale of many items such as hair dye packages, cosmetics, perfumes, denim pants, condoms, and books for women is prohibited. In most villages, they have also banned the sale of menstrual hygiene products, sanitary pads and period underwear, which is one of the basic needs of women, believing that its sale is shameful in public. Therefore, for the Taliban that considers the sale of sanitary napkins to women as a shame, how can it deal with women's protests in a peaceful manner? To them, it is natural to spray tear gas on women's heads and faces and forbid them from appearing in public for the reason of not wearing a burqa. Today, there is propaganda that the Taliban have changed and no longer have the strict rules of the past. However, the truth of their mentality is exactly the same thing that came out years ago.

Immediately after the American attack on Afghanistan in October 2001, the American State Department presented the harrowing image of the burqa-clad woman awaiting freedom as a key justification for the war.[4] After arriving in Kabul, the Taliban also repeated the history and announced their rule with pictures of women wearing burqas on the city's doors and walls. In the southern regions of Khorasan or Afghanistan and old Iran, the burqa has been accepted by women since the distant times of the fashion of

[3] Gina Vale, Devorah Margolin, and Farkhondeh Akbari, "Repeating the Past or Following Precedent? Contextualising the Taliban 2.0's Governance of Women," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)*, January 2023, https://doi.org/10.19165/2023.1.01.

[4] Malini Johar Schueller, "Cross-Cultural Identification, Neoliberal Feminism, and Afghan Women," *Genders 1998-2013: University of Colorado Boulder*, 2011, https://www.colorado.edu/gendersarchive1998-2013/2011/04/01/cross-cultural-identification-neoliberal-feminism-and-afghan-women.

that time. Despite the fact that the name burqa encompasses a wide range of modest clothing styles popular in South and Central Asia, Afghan women's burqas now are distinct from those described in historical texts. This is a slightly different dress that is mainly worn in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, people call it chadari which is several meters of fabric that comes in a variety of colours white, green, and yellow but blue is the most common choice and is often embroidered on the cap and across the front. In addition, the dress is usually pleated at the back.[5] Before the arrival of the Taliban, the use of the burqa was popular only in remote areas and among housewives and old women, and it had no place among the educated and young people of Afghanistan. The younger and more educated generation in Afghanistan has never recognised the burqa as part of Afghan culture.

1.2. Forced Marriage

The fundamental issue in marriage is full consent, which is also stated in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Article 1 of the Convention on Consent to Marriage, it is stated that no marriage should be legally registered without the full and free consent of both sides. The consent of man and woman must be expressed in person in the presence of the law and witnesses.[6] In Afghanistan, because most marriages take place without legal registration and failure to register a marriage is not considered a crime, the majority of girls get married in the presence of their families without any legal authority. According to the Afghan constitution, the legal age of marriage is 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys. Sixteen years old is the age when girls just enter the high school stage and start primary education, but according to the law, their marriage is considered legal. Article 77 of the Civil Code of Afghanistan also considers the marriage of underage girls as legal and correct with the permission of their parents.[7] Referring to the totality of the subject laws, there is a different approach in relation to this issue, one of which is more terrible than the other. In 2009, the president of the time approved the law that determined the legal age of marriage. In order to

[5] Nancy Jabbra, "Women, Words and War: Explaining 9/11 and Justifying U.S. Military Action in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 8, no. 1 (2013), 240.
[6] United Nations General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 10 December 1948, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html.
[7] "Rural Afghan Girls Continue To Fall Victim To "Baad" Marriages," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 28 July 2015, https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-baad-marriages-rural-girls/27157104.html.

implement this law, the approval of the parliament was necessary; however, The overwhelming presence of the conservative class in parliament ensured that this bill would be defeated.

Forced marriage is unquestionably lawful in a society where women's access to one of their most basic human rights—deciding when to get married—is restricted. The Norwegian author Åsne Seierstad writes in her novel *The Bookseller of Kabul* (2003) that

> *A wedding is like a small death. The bride's family mourns in the days following the wedding, as though it were a funeral. A daughter is lost, sold or given away. The mothers especially grieve. They have had complete control over their daughters: where they go, who they meet, what they wear, what they eat. They have spent most of the day together, gotten up together, swept the house together, and cooked together. After the weeding the daughter disappears, completely; she goes from one family to the other. She cannot visit when she wants, only when her husband allows her*.[8]

As the author mentions, women disappear after marriage, so that they can hardly meet their families. Because the majority of marriages are done in such a way that women go to the husband's house not as brides but as criminals and victims. An example is the culture of forced marriage, which in Afghanistan called Baad, the exchange of two girls between two families is called. It is a custom based on which girls are forced to marry to settle debts or family disputes. Some families exchange their daughters to end past enmities such as blood feuds or to settle honour enmities.[9] In this type of marriage, the consent of the daughters of both families is not very important, and the consent of the families is the basic condition of the marriage. This practise is widely held in impoverished rural areas and even in certain urban areas as a means to end long-standing hostilities. This practice is more common among Pashtuns and the girls of Pashtun-inhabited areas experience a large percentage of these marriages. According to the Baad tradition, when a person is killed, with the decision of local elders, and to prevent further bloodshed, a girl from the killer's family marries a man from the victim's family. This may be considered the end of hostilities for the men of the family; but for

[8] Åsne Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2003), 106.
[9] "Hope for Afghan Women Traded to End Feuds," *Institute For War & Peace Reporting*, accessed 24 September 2023, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/hope-afghan-women-traded-end-feuds.

the women, it is the beginning of problems and misfortune. Another reason that leads to women's forced marriage is the bride price.

In every part of the world, holding a marriage ceremony has certain characteristics based on climatic conditions, historical past, religious values, religious beliefs, and cultural and economic artefacts, and Afghanistan is no exception to this rule. Getting married in Afghanistan is more difficult than climbing the high peaks of the Pamir mountains. Marriages in Afghanistan are so expensive that sometimes a man stays engaged for years and cannot marry.[10] Actually, the prospective groom is responsible for all wedding costs, and he must make all the required arrangements; occasionally, the decision for the wedding costs six million Afghani (also known as sixty lags), which at the current exchange rate is equal to eighty thousand dollars. The bride price refers to the monetary gift given to the bride's family. It is tragic that millions of dollars are spent on a wedding day in a nation where half the population goes hungry and most children go barefoot.

As this involves the buying and selling of women, it is also regarded to be an act of violence against women. When a woman is sold, the buyer does any kind of violence to her after buying the woman, because she is sold as a husband's property, the owner of which is the man who paid money to buy her.[11] There is a famous proverb among people in Afghanistan. "Ba zar kharidam ba sang mekoshim" which literary means I bought you by money and I kill you with a stone.[12] It should not be said that Afghanistan has many ethnic and cultural diversity, and according to these conditions, there are also different customs in a ritual like marriage. The amount of money that is allocated for marriage is different in each tribe; Tajiks and Pashtuns spend the most money on marriage whereas the Hazaras spend the least. From the initial search for a bride all the way to the wedding and subsequent moving of the bride into the groom's home, there are many costs associated with a wedding. This unplanned approach might

[10] "Rural Afghan Girls Continue To Fall Victim To 'Baad' Marriages," *RFE/RL,* 28 July 2015, https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-baad-marriages-rural-girls/27157104.html.
[11] Deborah J. Smith, "Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)*, February 2009, https://www.refworld.org/docid/4992cc722.html.
[12] Hakima Afzaly, "Media Framing of Marriage Practices in Afghanistan" (Master of Arts, University of Northern Iowa, 2022), 9-10.

result in tension between the couple, their families, and even the premature end of the engagement in certain situations.

Occasionally, the spouse passes away due to an accident or disease. In this circumstance, the widow must marry the brother of her dead husband or a close cousin. In Afghanistan, this custom is called heritage marriage. In this regard, Elphinstone says that it is customary among Afghans that a man marry his deceased brother's wife. “And for the brother-in-law, it is a great insult if someone marries his brother's wife to another without his permission”.[13] Among Pashtun families, there is a famous saying that a woman enters her husband's house wearing a white dress and can only leave her husband's house with a white shroud.

1.3. Bacha posh

In backward societies whose inhabitants are culturally, socially, and educationally disadvantaged, women face the far more elemental problem of still being considered a source of shame for the family. In the majority of Afghanistan, there is still this mentality that having a male child preserves the family's name and emblem forever, while these views are opposite about having a female child. The non-acceptance of female children starts from the time of pregnancy of a mother. A mother who longs for a baby boy, with the birth of a baby girl, all her dreams are shattered and she becomes hopeless and disillusioned. In Afghan society, there is no celebration for the birth of a baby girl, and a woman who does not have a baby boy is actually considered a miserable woman. On the other hand, when a woman gives birth to a boy, they celebrate for seven nights and seven days and inform all their friends and relatives about the birth of their child with packages of sweets and almonds. This mentality of the heroization of women who have male children is similar to the same mentality that is expressed in the *Rig Veda*, or the religious collection of India. “In order to get rid of hell, having a son is necessary.”[14]

[13] Mountstuart Elphinstone, *An Account of The Kingdom of Caubul* (London: Longman, 1815), 127.
[14] Pallavi Thakur, “Fossilization of Gender Identities in the Hindu Social Structure: A Study through the Marriage Hymns of Atharva-Veda,” in *Proceedings of The 3rd International Academic Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences* (3rd International Academic Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences, Acavent, 2019), https://doi.org/10.33422/3rd.iachss.2019.08.483.

In many parts of Afghanistan, there is still this mentality that the first goal of marriage is to give birth to a son. Therefore, one of the reasons why women choose to wear men's clothing is this son's preference as in Afghanistan, male preference is socially constructed and laws, rules, and customs restrict women from full participation in society.[15] Since there is no guarantee for a woman to be able to give birth to a son, men wish to get many wives so that they can have many sons. In their view, sons are necessary for the continuation of descent and lineage and for protection as well as increasing wealth, property, security, and prosperity.

On the other hand, the daughter is considered a temporary and unstable member of the family, although she was born and raised in the family, eventually due to marriage, she will be sent to the husband's family and will become someone else's. In some cases, this sexual superiority starts from a patriarchal mentality in the family environment. Agents and the social context are among the things that are considered the main consequences of sexual superiority. In Afghanistan, the particular way of looking at the girl child is the same traditional type of society that has been preserved. The process of favouring male children over female children is strongly influenced by social values and norms as well as social institutions such as neighbours, friends, and family groups. In Afghanistan, social differences are considered natural environmental differences, and through religion, legends, customs, and religious rituals left over from the distant past, they become stronger day by day. In fact, women are considered second-class sex in the eyes of men in every way, while the male child is considered economically, politically, and socially privileged. This situation has affected women so much that if a woman gives birth to a girl child, the first step is that women comfort each other with words like “do not worry, you are still young, you can give birth to another child, (a son).”. These are all items that show the desire of families to have a son and at the same time, it illustrates not valuing the human and social position of the girl children. In some cases, social pressures and the traditional view on the issue of having several daughters make fathers ignore the existence of daughters. Still, when some fathers are asked how many children they have, in the answer, they only mention their sons.

[15] Nilab Hamidi, Cathy Vaughan, and Meghan A. Bohren, “‘My Father Told Me ‘Child, There Is No Son in This House, so You Should Wear These Boy Clothes’: Perspectives on Gender Norms, Roles, and Bacha Posh among Afghan Migrant Women in Melbourne, Australia,” *Journal of Migration and Health* 4 (2021), 6.

The phrase ‘bacha posh’ may be translated as ‘dressed up like a boy,’ and it refers to a long-standing custom in Afghanistan in which families who do not have boys choose one of their daughters to dress and act like a boy. Because of this, the youngster is able to engage in more liberated behaviours such as going to school, accompanying her sisters when they are out in public, and working.

1.4. Domestic Violence

In Afghanistan, the majority refuse to acknowledge the issue of violence against women while women in Afghanistan have suffered disproportionately from conflict. Afghan women have experienced the majority of the violence and still endure behaviours that are biased towards women.[16] Violence against women is one of the most common forms of violence in this country, where women's security in the family is seriously threatened by men. Violence against women originates from the hegemony of patriarchy, in which women are considered the second gender, and causes the reproduction of power inequality in the family. In Afghan society, men are at the centre and women are at the periphery of the family; hence, men are the embodiment of creativity and women are considered to be the embodiment of ignorance and emotion, and these two factors lead to the formation of two opposing forces within the family, which causes conflicts and violence against each other. Afghanistan is one of the countries where patriarchy in families has caused women to not have an independent existence and always remain subject to men and experience the worst kind of violence if they are not subject. The ideology of patriarchy in Afghan society has become so intertwined with the fabric of women that they have accepted it as a principle in the family. This hegemony has caused dominance in patriarchal societies and has created the power for men to commit violence against women and suppress them. Domestic violence is usually defined in other societies in forms such as verbal, psychological, social, financial, and sexual violence. However, in Afghanistan, unfortunately, domestic violence takes place in terrible forms, which is sometimes difficult for women to endure.

[16] Lina Abirafeh, “Freedom Is Only Won From the Inside: Domestic Violence in Post-Conflict Afghanistan,” *Women’s UN Report Network*, July 2006, https://wunrn.com/wp-content/uploads/112106_afghnaistan_domestic.pdf.

Statistical and qualitative information collected by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) about the cases of violence against women from twenty-two provinces of Afghanistan shows that violence in Afghanistan is sometimes more terrible than what the media reports. The information gathered from the interviews shows that violence against women remains largely unreported. Those incidents of violence against women that are reported to law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities or attract public attention through the media are a small percentage of the total number of such incidents. Collecting as much information as possible accurately, regularly and systematically is an urgent necessity for a better understanding of the causes of violence against women, which can later be effective in providing reforms and solutions, but unfortunately, most violence remains hidden for various reasons. Before the Taliban invaded Afghanistan in 2021, the Ministry of Women's Affairs documented 2,582 incidences of violence against women in only four months, according to ministry officials. In this report, it is stated that there were 34 cases of acute violence including 18 cases of murder, 7 cases of suicide, 8 cases of severe injury and 1 case of field court, and the rest were other physical violence.[17] According to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, violence against women has increased more in the south-eastern zone of the country. In this year, 235 cases of violence against women have been registered in Paktika province only. Most of the perpetrators of the violence are husbands or husbands' families.[18]

Ayesha is the name of an 18-year-old girl who has dominated international news headlines for the last few years. Her photograph was featured on the cover of the renowned American magazine *Time*, revealing that she lacks ears and a nose. Ayesha's family married her off when she was twelve years old in order to reconcile family disagreements, known as baad in Afghanistan. In certain regions of Afghanistan, giving baad is a popular practise used to reconcile family and local issues. The cousin of the person who subsequently became Ayesha's husband was murdered by Ayesha's uncle,

[17] Fereshta Abbasi and Patricia Gossman, "'I Thought Our Life Might Get Better': Implementing Afghanistan's Elimination of Violence against Women Law" (Human Rights Watch, 2021), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/07/afghanistan0821_web.pdf.

[18] "In Search of Justice for Crimes of Violence Against Women and Girls," *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 1 December 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/AF/UNAMA_OHCHR_Violence_Women.pdf.

and in accordance with a typical practise in certain parts of Afghanistan, Ayesha's father offered her and her sister to the family's relatives to pay the blood price. According to reports, her husband's family treated her and her sister like slaves and frequently abused them. Ayesha escaped this torture, but her husband's relatives found her in Kandahar and took her back to Uruzgan. The field court of the Taliban in the area ordered Ayesha's ears and nose to be cut off, and Ayesha's husband personally executed the order on the slopes of one of Uruzgan's mountains. Ayesha was abandoned there to bleed to death.[19]

In Afghanistan, honour killing is another kind of domestic violence; it is a long-standing societal norm that has persisted despite many and deep changes in the aspects of social life. The term honour as a social phenomenon is one of those concepts that has a special meaning in every society and there is no single, comprehensive and standard definition of this concept. In fact, the concept of honour should be defined in the cultural and social context of every society. However, a woman's chastity and self-denial are the main elements of all the definitions of honour which is the result of men's control over women's social and sexual behavior in society.[20] Therefore, it can be said that the concept of honour is completely rooted in the patriarchal structures of traditional societies. Crimes related to honour include violent acts against those women in the family who are thought to have brought shame and dishonour to the family due to their shameless and scandalous actions. The occurrence of honour killings is not a rare phenomenon. The United Nations Human Rights Fund has estimated that at least 5,000 honour killings are registered worldwide every year, and Afghanistan is one of these countries.[21] There are several elements at the micro (individual), meso (personal and group connections), and macro (social structures) levels that contribute to the frequency of honour murders. The majority of internal and external study has focused on cultural and social issues since the prevalence of honour murders is thought to have a tight relationship with the social and cultural structures of society. This study examines the impact of societal structures and learning processes on attitudes concerning honour

[19] Patricia Skinner, "The Gendered Nose and Its Lack: "Medieval" Nose-Cutting and Its Modern Manifestations," *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 45–67.
[20] "In Search of Justice for Crimes of Violence Against Women and Girls," 14.
[21] Meetoo Veena and Heidi Safia Mirza, "'There Is Nothing 'Honourable' about Honour Killings': Gender, Violence and the Limits of Multiculturalism," in *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam*, ed. Mohammad Mazher Idriss and Tahir Abbas (New York: Routledge, 2011), 42–66.

murders. It was done utilising cross-sectional data obtained from a number of cities in Afghanistan:

> *In Afghanistan, women are sometimes subjected to violence because of the issue of virginity or not. Another marriage practice in Afghanistan is the requirement of virginity. The ritual takes place after woman "Zafaf" or (wedding night) where she expected to bleed to demonstrate her virginity. The virginity is one of another Hymen is one of the most sensitive issues in many traditional and conservative societies, especially in Afghanistan. In Afghan society the health and lack of health of the hymen for girls who are not legally married is directly related to her honor and dignity, family and even tribe of that girl and is considered as her purity.*[22]

The primary virginity problem in Afghanistan is founded on a traditional historical perspective. These tragedies result from men's strong sexist attitudes in patriarchal countries. Misogyny is a byproduct of private property, which has traditionally considered women as property belonging to males. In actuality, private property views women as the property of their fathers and brothers, followed by their spouses, and expects women to submit to males. Therefore, any infringement of the rule of men may be punished severely. Every punishment serves as a deterrent to other women who are contemplating disobedience, therefore there is a kind of masculine coalition involved in its execution. In this way, regardless of religion, class, and ethnicity, women in such societies are the capital of men. And the capital owner has the right to determine the fate of his properties. This approach has turned women into a commodity that can be bought and sold. The report published by the Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan in 2013, shows that the most common type of honour killing in Afghanistan, according to its background and previous factors, is the murder that takes place because of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. This report stated that 43% of the perpetrators of the murders were unknown, and the perpetrators of the other 57% were family members, which were brothers, fathers and husbands, brothers-in-law, and other relatives. The report also adds that sometimes, issues that have nothing to do with 'illegitimate sexual

[22] "The Forced Virginity Testing of Women in Afghanistan," *UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog* (blog), 21 November 2018, https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2018/11/21/the-forced-virginity-testing-of-women-in-afghanistan/.

relations' or even 'rape', just with a completely personal and undocumented suspicion towards women, can lead to honour killings.[23]

1.5. Pashtunwali

"Afghanistan is a heterogeneous society of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Aimaqs (constituting about 50%, 26%, 8%, 7%, and 6%, respectively, of the population), and a large number of other much smaller ethnic groups."[24] The issue of women and women's freedom has been the main focus of tensions between the two biggest ethnic groups, Pashtuns and Tajiks for years. The Pashtuns are a group of mainly extremists living in the area between the Hindu Kush in northeastern Afghanistan and the northern part of the Indus River in Pakistan.[25] Pashtunwali is a concept

> *which can be interpreted as an ethnic self-portrait of the Pashtuns. It includes all traditions by which the Pashtuns, according to their understanding, distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups: their tribal spirit, a sophisticated code of honour, moral and ethical rules of behaviour, the demand for martial bravery, reasonable actions and consultation, a system of customary legal norms and not least, faith in Islam.*[26]

In Afghanistan, it is widely believed that the structures of the extreme and patriarchal systems are the ethnic structures of the Pashtuns, which is one of the most effective factors for the emergence of the Taliban in the contemporary era. This is not the only general belief among Afghans themselves, the authors who have travelled to Afghanistan also have the same theory about this group. John Weaver in his book *Inside Afghanistan* writes about the time when Osama bin Laden, the leader of Pashtuns was in a position of authority in Afghanistan:

> *In 1996, the Taliban seized control of Kabul by driving out Rabbani and killing Najibullah. At this time they began to enforce their strict Islamic code on the entire population. Women were deprived of most of their rights and required to wear the*

[23] "In Search of Justice for Crimes of Violence Against Women and Girls," 14-16.
[24] Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady, "The Decline of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey* 35, no. 7 (1995), 621.
[25] "Pashtun," in *Britannica*, accessed 27 September 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pashtun.
[26] Lutz Rzehak, "Pashtunwali – tribal life and behaviour among the Pashtuns," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 21 March 2011, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/special-reports/pashtunwali-tribal-life-and-behaviour-among-the-pashtuns/.

> *traditional head-to-toe covering when in public. Girls lost the opportunity for education, and most schools were closed, because the Taliban believe that nothing but the Koran needs to be studied. Punishment for even minor infractions was severe. Public beatings, hangings, and gun executions became common.*[27]

In reality, the Pashtunwali tradition defines women as "half-valued individuals." Women are regarded as the personal property of males, and according to Pashtun customs, their virginity and "good behaviour" are essential to a man's honour and reputation as a "true Pashtun." If a woman violates these standards, she will be stoned to death.

[27] John Weaver, *Inside Afghanistan: The American Who Stayed Behind after 9/11 and His Mission of Mercy to a War-Torn People* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2002), 46-47.

CHAPTER TWO

SUBALTERN THEORY

2.1. Subaltern Theory

The term Subaltern was first used by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci to describe social groups that are under the domination or hegemony of the ruling class.[28] The word was popularized as a critical concept to describe subordinates in the fields of politics and culture. In this connection, Thomas writes that from Gramsci's point of view, this concept refers to societies that are suffering under the hegemonic rule of the ruling elite class, and their basic rights, which are participation in the development of local history and culture, are being trampled upon.[29] In a part of his prison notebooks, Gramsci emphasizes the necessity of theoretical study of the lower classes, focusing on several key issues:

- *The basis of the formation of these social classes*
- *Their dependence on the political processes of the ruling class*
- *Their active participation in politics and after that*
- *The formation of social relations that indicates the autonomy and potential independence of the lower classes.*[30]

Gramsci's theories about the concept of subaltern otherness inspired a group of South Asian historians to found the Subaltern Studies Group. The members of this group, especially Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, David Arnold and Gayatri Spivak, while

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[28] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, "Subaltern," in *Postcolonial Studies : The Key Concepts* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 246.

[29] Peter D. Thomas, "Refiguring the Subaltern," *Political Theory* 46, no. 6 (2018), 865, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591718762720.

[30] Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections From The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 47.

researching the Indian peasant resistance in the 1980s, tried to present a new narrative of Indian and South Asian history.[31]

Although the subject of the subaltern has always been the focus of post-colonial thinkers, it seems that Spivak and Homie Baba have shown more sensitivity to it compared to others. In her controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," Spivak questions the history of the writers of the subaltern studies due to the one-dimensional use of this concept and raises the question of whether the subaltern, especially women, are able to achieve a single voice and the right to express their opinion. According to Spivak, an ideological structure based on gender ultimately leads to the domination of men, and Spivak emphasises the work of historians working in the field of subaltern studies has sought to correct the gender and class blindness of elite bourgeois. So, Spivak kept pushing the boundaries of subaltern studies by centring her research on the lives of women who had been written out of official Indian history. Spivak contends that Mahasweta Devi's "Breast-Giver" which is written in Bengali language strongly articulates the history of female subalterns through the female protagonist Jashoda. The story describes the decay of Jashoda's mother's body after she is adopted as a professional mother in a wealthy Brahmin family. For Spivak, Jashoda's maternal body strongly highlights the non-success of Indian nationalism in emancipating lower-class, subaltern women and also challenges the supposition, predominant in Western society and culture that women's reproductive labour is undesired and offensive, domestic work.

Another key offering of the subaltern feminist thought is a social critique of Western feminism especially its universalizing claim to talk for all women regardless of differences in class, culture, language, or nationality.[32] Spivak also emphasizes that the subaltern is never able to resist or oppose the dominant discourse - a discourse that creates the language and conceptual divisions through which the subaltern is able to speak. From Spivak's point of view, the way that defines the colonizer or the inferior ruling class is an elitist act itself.[33] Based on this reason, even if the ruling power claims

[31] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, "Subaltern," 246.
[32] Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 2003), 8-9.
[33] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 271–313.

that it allows the subordinates to speak, in practice they cannot express themselves and their identity is inevitably defined and distorted by the elites.

Homi Baba takes a different position regarding the concept of the subordinate class. Instead of examining the cultural relations between the ruling power and the subjugated with a political approach, he looks at it from a psychological and non-gender perspective. One of the main assumptions of subjugated scholars is that the critic, while rewriting the history of India or other post-colonial societies, is capable of empowering and revitalizing the position of the subjugated, on her behalf in the society. This is where Gayatri Spivak, in her works, by challenging this key hypothesis, calls the humble researchers to review their research results. It is worth saying that Spivak considers herself a part of the flow of subaltern studies, and reflects her criticisms compassionately from within the movement. Spivak has always described herself as a "feminist, de-structuralist, and activist Marxist" and, in common parlance, a fault-finding and excuse-making critic who believes that the theoretical integration of issues related to the rights of women and working classes in multicultural societies and reviewing their position from the perspective of restructuring in order to achieve social justice will be a path forward.

Spivak's critical approach is a reaction to the tendency of radical political movements to heroize the "sub" and exaggerate the "intrinsic role of the Third-World people in advancing the battle against global and multinational capitalism. Obviously, this problem stems from the basic deconstruction of the most specific violent structures in the language of critique and theory. However, it does not make Spivak consider herself a different species. Spivak uses the suicide of an ordinary woman to illustrate the impact of the dominant culture on the subaltern:

> *A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, hanged heself in her father's modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhuvaneswari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She had*

finally been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself.[34]

The analysis of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's suicide and Spivak's critical reading of the Indian society's reaction to this event are among the memorable phrases of the article. Bhuvaneswari, who was aware of the possibility of her death being associated with uninitiated sexual relations in public opinion, had consciously chosen her monthly period as the date of her suicide and, in Spivak's words, "while waiting, Bhuvanesari, the brahmacarini who was no doubt looking forward to good wifehood, perhaps rewrote the social text of sati-suicide in an interventionist way."[35] She rewrote her life. The fact that according to the custom of Sati, a widow should wait until the end of her menstrual period to sacrifice herself and that Bhuvaneswari had chosen exactly this period of time to end her life is a sign of her effort.[36] However, the thing that bothers Spivak more than anything is the superficial confrontation of the people around this woman and also the Indian elite with the complicated political and social conditions of her life. The short answer of Spivak to the question "Can the subaltern speak?" is no because the subjugated, under the rule of colonialism, has a multifaceted identity and belongs to heterogeneous societies.

2.2. Application of Subaltern into Afghan Context

History as a narrative conflict is the main epistemology in the studies of subaltern. It proves that various factors and imposed cultures have usually robbed the subalterns, especially women, brutally stripped off their rights and subjected them to violence. For the reason that violence is the oppressive side of power, there are inevitably superior and subaltern sides in a violent relationship. By combining philosophical concepts and everyday life, Spivak has been able to draw different dimensions of the violence against women issue in third-world countries. With the aim of explaining the different layers of violence caused by a patriarchal society, this section uses Spivak's theory to show how Afghan writers have represented different aspects of subalternity in the events of the stories and used the issue of women as a narrative theme.

[34] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 307.
[35] Spivak, 307.
[36] Concetta Principe, "Spivak's Fantasy of Silence: A Secular Look at Suicide," *Journal for Cultural Research* 17, no. 3 (2013), 239.

Gender discrimination in the literature of the third world is an issue that is given a different direction. For instance, Indian feminist Chandra Mohanty has criticized the discrimination between Western women and third-world women in her article "Under Western Eyes" that Western feminists ignore the concept of race in the representation of women of the third world. Mohanty explains that the common image of third-world women is more religious, dependent and pious compared to first-world women who are liberal, independent and secular. To her, Western feminists characterize third-world women as backward, illiterate, non-progressive and religious.[37] Kimberle Crenshaw claims that third-world women are victims of double discrimination. This means that women are discriminated against firstly based on their race and colour, and secondly as being women.[38] Unlike other writers of subjugated women, Spivak ignores all discussions of the distinction between Western and non-western women rather she focuses on the causes that deaden the sound of the subaltern women. She explains that subalterns can speak if they retrieve and restore history and question their identity to find out the cause of their persecution.[39] To Spivak, the best way to pull down the oppression from society is to give a voice to marginalized or subaltern communities in discourse and legislative issues. The literary structure of the two books in question is a way to express the concerns of subalterns, but at the same time, in the novels, the power of seeing is available to the woman, who reflects a picture of the feminine world as a result. Both novels rely on the representation of voice, agency, and the reconstruction of common mentalities or structures around women.

In *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Nadia Hashimi attempts to link the female characters with contemporary trends by defying the paternal standards and traditional customs upon which Afghan traditions are based. Hashimi's protagonist, Rahima, finally comes out of her shell when she agrees to the traditional role of the bacha posh and begins to live her life in accordance with her own desires. In consequence, she becomes a pearl that breaks its shell. Hashimi depicts the expedition of Afghan women and their struggle for survival in difficult political conditions. Hashimi narrates the history of Afghanistan,

[37] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2* 12/13 (1984), 341-42, https://doi.org/10.2307/302821.
[38] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), 1244, https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.
[39] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 307.

the Soviet and American invasions and the consequences that have affected the lives of Afghan women. Cruelty, humiliation, patriarchy, and one-sided policies in a male context are all issues that are discussed.

Women in Afghanistan have not only struggled with many challenges caused by the imperial powers of the Western organized wars but also suffered from the traditional, religious and social norms imposed by their own patriarchy. Although the reasons for the exclusion of women from the stage of history are multifaceted, in underdeveloped countries that are under the rule of Islamic regimes, the inclusion of religion for women is inevitable. In Islamic countries, religion contributes a lot to the culture of society and creates certain moral roles in everyday life. As for Afghanistan, Islamic rulings have woven the entire face of the country, especially since the late 1990s. Considering that although there are no formal laws, the regulation of local traditions in the country is mandatory. New restrictions imposed by the Taliban have made life difficult for Afghan women, but the country's history since the 1990s shows that they have always been subject to severe limitations. In recent times, women in Afghanistan have not enjoyed much freedom, and freedom had no meaning in other areas except in the capital cities. Women's liberation is thought to have reached its peak just as the United States emerged as the only saviour of the East and a champion of women's rights across the developing globe.

The book by Khaled Hosseini has also lifted the veil on the fact that, particularly for women, this has never been the case in Afghanistan. The women of Afghanistan have suffered the most from the devastation, poverty, identity crises, and sexism created by the wars between Russia and the United States in that country. Hosseini shows how the war in Afghanistan takes away the freedom that women used to enjoy. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini depicts Afghan women whose inferiority is always interwoven with patriarchy and the governing forces. Unavoidably, millions of Afghans have been subjected to different crimes and horrible deeds committed by oppressors and patriarchy. They are girls who are forced to get married at a very early age. They are the wives who serve their husbands like a slave. They are mothers who sacrifice themselves to protect their children during war and give them a better future. “Although they are also the subjects of colonization and politics, subaltern women have always been an

inspiration for writers and photographers because their voice needs to be heard."[40] Khaled Hosseini also tries to bring the voice of Afghan women to the world's ears.

[40] Nur Banu Karaman, "Subaltern Portraits in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Sea of Poppies* and *The Afghan Girl*', *Overtones Ege Journal of English Studies*, no. 1 (2022), 6.

CHAPTER THREE

NADIA HASHIMI'S NOVEL

3.1. The Life of Nadia Hashimi

Nadia Hashimi is an Afghan-American doctor and novelist born in December 1977. Nadia's parents are originally from Afghanistan and left the country before the Russian invasion. Nadia's mother travelled to Europe to get an engineering degree and her father immigrated to New York, where Nadia Hashimi was born, and then raised in New Jersey.[41] She had the chance to have a large family of aunts and uncles, and their children around her, and this made the Afghan culture an important part of her daily life, so she was able to learn Persian.[42] Hashimi went to Brandeis University where she majored in Middle Eastern Studies and Biology. She made her first trip to Afghanistan in 2002. Nadia Hashimi travelled to Afghanistan for the first time with her parents who had not seen their country since the late 1970s. For her, this trip was a bittersweet experience, because made her able to find artefacts from her parents' old houses and get to know more about the history and culture of her homeland. She later entered medical school in Brooklyn and became a member of an Afghan-American social organization whose goal was to promote and teach cultural customs, especially in the dark and tragic days after the September 2001 incident. After graduating from medical school, she went to Bellevue Hospital in New York City to complete her speciality courses in paediatrics. Hashimi is married and lives with her husband and children in Maryland, where she is currently working as a paediatrician.

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[41] Anwesa Chattopadhyay, "'At the Crossroads of Central Asia': Analyzing the Varied Aspects of Afghan Society and Its Representation in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Nadia Hashimi's *When The Moon Is Low*," *Quest Journals Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* 9, no. 1 (2021), 24.

[42] Nadia Hashimi: 2016 National Book Festival, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVReae6muUw.

Nadia Hashimi is also a member of Women Doctors, a local group of medical women blogging. Hashimi attempted to fulfil a long-neglected goal after finishing the rigorous curriculum of medical school. Her educational experiences and personal interest in Afghanistan, especially the hard life of women in that country, led her to introduce the life of women in that country to the world in the form of narratives. The shape of her stories is formed from the land of her parents and grandparents, the narratives that deal with the depth of the disgusting cultures in the country. Nadia Hashimi has spent many years in exile, yet she has nevertheless managed to produce bestselling literature based on her own country's rich cultural history. Her books span generations and continents and cover topics such as forced migration, conflict, poverty, misogyny, colonialism, and addiction. Hashimi is regarded as one of the feminist writers who showcases the admirable qualities of her country (ancestry). The Western bias toward women's concerns and its portrayal of women in developing countries were also highlighted in her novels.[43]

3.2. Her Novels

Most of Nadia Hashimi's stories follow a particular theme. All the events of the previous several decades, from the collapse of the monarchy to the rise of the communists following the Soviet Union's involvement in Afghanistan, the emergence of the Taliban, and more, are reflected in Hashimi's writings about Afghanistan and its people. A large number of Hashimi's novels refer to the culture and traditions of Afghanistan (both from a positive and critical point of view). Nadia is one of the authors who has written about the plight of women.[44] The tales have prominent tragic themes, with migration serving as one of the few constants, and it is likely that the authors' own experiences prompted and informed their writing. The development and improvement of her writing style, however, is well-known. Early works tend to have a more monolithic authorial perspective and less nuanced plot development. Hashimi's later works, however, broadened her vision and used the maximum capacities of the story both in terms of content and made significant progress in terms of technique.

[43] Rouwaida Jasim Mohammed and Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed, "A Non-Western Representation of the Third World Women in Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*," *Arab World English Journal For Translation and Literary Studies* 6, no. 3 (2022), 115, https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol6no3.8.
[44] Hilal Ahmad Kumar, "Explicating Violence and Suffering in Nadia Hashimi's The Pearl That Broke Its Shell," *International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)* 4, no. 2 (2022), 154.

Although the protagonists of her works often come from outside of Afghanistan—especially the United States—and the male characters in Afghanistan almost always play more aggressive roles, this is evidence of her devotion to her adopted homeland.

But her impressive ability to depict women truthfully lets the reader feel genuine empathy for the people in his novels. Her works focus on the concept of "common suffering," or the shared experience of the author and the reader. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014), *When The Moon Is Low* (2015), *A House Without Window* (2016), *One Half From The East* (2016), *The Sky at Our Feet* (2018), *Sparks Like Stars* (2021), are the novels written about Afghanistan, which have explored most of the challenges facing women. For instance, *A House Without Window* is perhaps one of the rarest stories that deals with the depth of women's tragedy in Afghanistan. In this story, Nadia Hashimi deals with the life of a group of women, each of whom is in a women's prison because of breaking the prevailing traditions of Afghan women whose misfortunes have brought them to a dark cell. A prison that is actually a safe shelter for women. The book is a shocking scene from the life of modern Afghan women, who are struggling in a scary and victorious way. The protagonist of *When the Moon Is Low*, a courageous Afghan lady, decides to leave her homeland when Taliban terrorists kill her husband, providing an excellent account of an Afghan family's flight from a nation dominated by the Taliban. The book explores the plight of contemporary migrants stuck between the issues of displacement and emplacement from the viewpoint of a female migrant.

3.2. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*

In this novel, Nadia Hashimi tells the lives of two Afghan women with a gap of almost a century. Although there is a long-time gap between these two characters, the fate of both is similar in some way.[45] Rahima, the first character of the story, lives in the late 1990s, a period when Afghanistan is affected by civil wars and local riots, and women are also subjected to cruel customs and traditions caused by the rise of the Taliban. Rahima and her four sisters live in a small house with their mother and their father who is addicted to drugs. Their father who, because of his drug addiction, is unable to provide for or safeguard his daughters. The mother of these four girls, a typical Afghan

[45] Hilal Ahmad Kumar, "Explicating Violence and Suffering in Nadia Hashimi's The Pearl That Broke Its Shell," 155.

lady, is unable to protect them from adverse circumstances. The mother herself is a sinner in the eyes of her husband because she has never been able to produce even a son and she must be blamed for such weakness for the rest of her life. These four girls actually have only one supporter who supports them in many cases, which is their aunt. The woman who is the only reckless and brave supporter of these girls. The four sisters are going through a terrible fate.[46]

The addicted father of the family suddenly gives three daughters (the eldest of whom is only fifteen years old) to much older men. Rahima, the fourth daughter of the family, gave up her female identity in order to escape the traditions of Afghanistan and appears in the society as a boy. Rahima cuts her hair; wears boy's clothes and turns into a bacha posh.[47] Although appearing in the role of a boy in society is not Rahima's wish, her mother, with the advice of her sister, forces Rahima to make such a decision. Rahima may first resent her newfound independence, but she does not take long to adjust to her new lifestyle. The freedom for Rahima is short-lived and fleeting because she also becomes the fourth wife of a man who is three times her age and has to fully attend to marital duties and wifely affairs in a house full of hatred. By creating the character of Rahima in this book Nadia Hashimi is actually trying to make the hero of the story character which is an Afghan woman. Even though Rahima is going through many problems, she still decides to fight her fate to open a new way in her life with her aunt's encouragement. Rahima attends school for a few years and learns to read and write, she manages to get to the House of Representatives as an assistant to a female representative and gain experiences that will later change her life path. Rahima is the figure who redefines what it is to have power as she fights to break free from injustice.[48]

In addition, this book also deals with the life of Shakiba. Shakiba is the mother of Rahima's grandmother, the first character of the story, a woman who lived a century before Rahima and her story is set in the 1900s. Shakiba lives with her family in a

[46] Suci Suryani and Amelia Febianingrum, "Redefinition of Power by Rahima in Nadia Hashimi: 'The Pearl That Broke Its Shell,'" *PARAFRASE: Jurnal Kajian Kebahasaan & Kesastraan* 22, no. 2 (2022), 217.
[47] Amel Abbady, "Afghanistan's 'Bacha Posh': Gender-Crossing in Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*," *Women's Studies* 51, no. 2 (2022), 245, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2021.2023531.
[48] Suci Suryani and Amelia Febianingrum, "Redefinition of Power by Rahima in Nadia Hashimi: 'The Pearl That Broke Its Shell,'" 218.

mountain village with a relatively peaceful lifestyle.[49] At the age of two, due to a moment of neglect by her parents, she suffered severe burns with hot oil and lost the beauty of half of her face forever. Similar to Rahima, Shakiba also has a tragic life. The troubles of this little girl do not end with the burns on her face. Due to the cholera epidemic, Shakiba loses her whole family and is left completely alone. After she loses his entire family, she starts living with her father's family, headed by her vindictive and unkind grandmother. Shakiba's grandmother sends the teenager to the house of a businessman in return for her debt. This family later donates Shakiba to the companions of Shah Habibullah, the king of Afghanistan at that time. In this way, the hand of fate takes Shakiba to the king's palace, her life in the palace is told just like the fate of Rahima. In this palace, Shakiba turns into a man and is assigned to guard the women of the shrine as a guard. The path of Shakiba's life is also not without twists and turns. Sometime later, the incident that happens in the shrine makes her come close to death and stoning, and only a miracle will save her from her fate.

[49] Oumeddour Safa, "Afghan Women through Generations: A Feminist Analysis of Nadia Hashimi's The Pearl That Broke Its Shell (2014)," Master's Thesis, Université 8 Mai 1945 Guelma, 2022, 24-25, http://dspace.univ-guelma.dz/jspui/handle/123456789/13597.

CHAPTER FOUR

KHALED HOSSEINI'S NOVEL

4.1. The Life of Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini is a novelist, doctor, and social activist, born on March 4, 1965, in Kabul, Afghanistan.[50] Hosseini is fluent in the national languages of Afghanistan, namely Farsi, and Pashto. He translated works such as *Alice in Wonderland* by English author Lewis Carroll and *Mike Hammer* series, a work by Mickey Spillane into Persian. He moved to Paris with his family at the age of eleven, later he received a political asylum in the United States of America in 1980.[51] They decided to return to Kabul in 1980, but at that time, Afghanistan was involved in a bloody communist coup and a military attack by the Soviet Union. At that time, millions of Afghans were migrating due to these attacks. Hosseini's family also applied for political asylum in the United States and finally moved to San Jose, California in September 1980. Hosseini was 15 years old at the time and could not speak English when he arrived in America. He described this experience as cultural shock and alienation. Hosseini graduated from Esteghlal High School in 1984 enrolled in Santa Clara University and received his bachelor's degree in biology in 1988. The following year, he entered the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, and received his medical degree in 1993. In March 2001, he started writing at the same time as his medical work and wrote his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. In 2006, Khaled Hosseini was appointed as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Refugee Agency. He founded The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, inspired by his trip to Afghanistan with the United Nations High

[50] Mary F. Agnello et al., "Afghanistan and Multiculturalism in Khaled Hosseini's Novels: Study of Place and Diversity," *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal* 3, no. 2 (2009), 97.
[51] Rachel Blumenthal, "Looking for Home in the Islamic Diaspora of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Azar Nafisi, and Khaled Hosseini," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2012), 263.

Commissioner for Refugees. This foundation is a non-profit organization that provides humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan.

Hosseini did not return to Afghanistan until 2003 when he was 38 years old. He currently lives in Northern California with his wife Roya and two children named Harris and Farah. Regarding the theme of Khaled Hosseini's stories, it can be said that he generally tries to use similar patterns for the backgrounds of the stories in his books. According to him, the idea of writing exclusively about the Taliban and the war with the Soviet Union is not what he wants to write, however the characters in his stories are inevitably tied to the political situation of their country, and he cannot advance the story without the narration of the war. Hosseini's books, as well as his novels, are all about Afghanistan, and his stories take place in the context of this country. Hosseini always introduces an Afghan, sometimes a woman, sometimes a man, as the main character of his stories to show family perspectives, and his concerns are clearly visible in his writings. His writings to date have given the Afghan people a global platform from which to express their views. Characteristics such as altruism, compassion, and bravery, as well as Hosseini's significance to the Afghan people, are readily apparent in his works.

4.2. His Novels

Hosseini is currently one of the most brilliant Afghan writers in the world whose novels have many points of interest such as the plots, the characters the settings and the author's writing style. In addition, Hosseini's novels also touch on interesting themes such as emigration, colonization, ethnicity, salvation in love, oppression and conflict between traditional and modern cultures.[52] Hosseini has written many books, the most famous of which are the books written in English. His books *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *And The Mountains Echoed* (2013) and *Sea Prayer* (2018) have been translated into over 50 different languages, published in over 70 different countries, and have sold over 40 million copies worldwide.

[52] Maithry Shinde, *Ethnicity in Afghanistan Literature: Khaled Hosseini, Nadeem Aslam, Yasmina Khadra and Latifa* (New Delhi: Prestige Books International, 2021), 45-48.

Hosseini writes about disrupting gender, racial, and border stereotypes. His books are like riding a wooden boat and surfing on a placid sea; he grabs the reader's hand and throws the soul of the reader into his tales with simple one-line narratives. Although the simple and friendly tone of his works is what distinguishes his works from other writers, it should be noted that Khaled Hosseini expresses very complex themes in simple words and the depth of his stories is like an ocean. The vividness and concreteness of the narratives are other characteristics of this great author's novels. In such a way that by reading his works, you feel like you are experiencing the world through the eyes of the characters in the novel. Perhaps this is due to the author setting an example via his own life and the lives of tens of thousands of others. Hosseini has had great success because he always strives to write realistically about serious issues, profound emotions, and the pain and anguish of the human condition. In Hosseini's works, there are no racial stereotypes. Khaled Hosseini, who has always been under the burden of people's looks and words about his place of birth, has tried to teach people to think beyond borders and should not give in to limitations. Hosseini, in his works, always criticizes restrictive traditions and stereotypes and moves the mental boundaries of his readers and deals with the depth of human relations.[53]

4.3. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which was published in 2007, is one of Khaled Hosseini's most brilliant works, after the novel *Kite Runner*. It is a significant narrative which highlights the plight of Afghan women living under the debilitating shadow of patriarchal oppression and war and expresses the critical situation of contemporary Afghan society.[54] Hosseini begins to seek and investigate in many ways. The route along which families mature, hurt, encounter treachery, are exposed to violence, and at times sacrifice for one another. In this novel, Hosseini portrays the inevitable fate of women who live in such a crisis-stricken society and addresses the Middle Eastern women's issue.[55] Although there is a lot of character in this story, Hosseini tries to use

[53] J. Dhivya Silvester, "A Study on Human Relations in the Novels of Khaled Hosseini and Atiq Rahimi," *Language in India* 17, no. 12 (2017), 133.
[54] Basharat Shameem, "Living On The Edge: Women In Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*," *Research Journal of English Language and Literature* (RJELAL) 2, no. 4 (2014): 62–66.
[55] Lindsay B. Shapiro, "Middle Eastern Women's Issues, An Analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The New York Times*," Master's Thesis, University of Florida, 2010, 34.

storytelling to recreate Afghan female characters as courageous modern archetypes. Mariam, the first main character of the story, is the illegitimate daughter of an Afghan businessman named Jalil a little girl who lives with her suffering mother in a village far away from her father and dreams of living next to her father in the city. The mother, who does not want her daughter, who is called a bastard, to be humiliated by others, tries to stop her from this request, but Mariam still insists, leaves her mother, and goes to Kabul. The guard of the house prevents her from entering. Mariam spends the night in front of the house in the cold weather until Jalil returns and they let her in. Jalil's two other women, each of whom has a daughter, are unhappy with Mariam's presence and try to kick her out of the house. Being humiliated by the women and the father's indifference makes Mariam leave there and return to her mother. But when she gets home, a shocking scene squeezes her heart. Mariam witnesses her mother's hanging and, out of need, returns to her father. Mariam's bad fate starts here. The stepmothers force Jalil to agree to the marriage proposal of Rasheed, a man of about forty years old, and Mariam marries Rasheed with complete dissatisfaction. Rasheed is similar to her father and from an extremely traditional Pashtun family. In this novel, Hosseini ties the lives of two women together. Laila, the daughter of an intellectual teacher, is eager to learn and her friends envision a bright future for her. Laila's mother grieves for the sons who went to war and she has no news of their survival. The character of Laila in this story is a reflection of the life of women during the civil wars and the bitter taste of immigration. In this novel, Laila and Tariq are two childhood friends who experience a failed love. Tariq is forced to leave the city and Laila due to family circumstances. Following the civil war and political issues, Laila loses her mother and father as a result of a bomb that hits their house. Because of not having a guardian, she decides to marry Rasheed, the husband of Mariam and the first main character of the story.

Laila’s entry into Rasheed and Mariam's life and the birth of a child opens a new page of failures and disappointments for Mariam. Their initially hostile relationship turns into a friendly relationship during the story, which in the end looks more like a mother-and-daughter relationship. The two women fight against a patriarchal society in which they live through a form of mother-daughter bond. These two women have such mother-daughter feelings for each other that even Mariam kills her husband to save Laila. The

scene depicts the resistance of women against oppression imposed on them through their culture, lifestyle, norms, and principles of society.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNDOING SUBALTERNITY IN THE NOVELS

5.1. Patriarchy

The fourth part of the subaltern studies is actually a semi-specialized study about the subaltern woman and the epistemic violence that has been inflicted on her in India. Being a woman, being black, and being poor are actually three layers of being a subaltern. This means that the issue of women's awareness as a subordinate co-existed with her racial and class consciousness. Spivak rewrites Freud's statement "A child is being beaten," in this way "white men save brown women from brown men."[56] Perhaps this is the most important proposition of Spivak, who proposes a critical study of women, race and the lower class in a mixed manner that Spivak deals with the topic of the identity of humans and takes two fundamental parts of identity, specifically gender, and race, as her subjects of interest.[57] Spivak considers this repression to be a type of collective history of sadomasochistic repression in collective imperialist action which is appropriate to study in the framework of wild psychoanalysis. The history of suppressing the child lies in her forgetfulness, and the history of suppressing subjugation lies in the ancient past of India. By connecting Freud to Marx, Spivak tries to explain the ideological deception of the imperialist political economy and outline the history of repression. The history of repression has two roots: The abolition of the sacrifice of widows by Britain in 1829, and the past is tied to the texts of Dharmaśāstra and Rigveda.

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[56] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 296.
[57] Fatemeh Pourjafari, "The Concept of Identity and Subaltern in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *Journal of New Trends in English Language Learning* 1, no. 1 (2022), 22.

Khaled Hosseini's novel also narrates the subject of women's subalternity in the form of story characters in different ways. Being a woman, being alone, being impoverished as well as being a widow are actually the layers of subalternity in Khaled Hossein's novel. Mariam's mother commits suicide by hanging herself when her daughter abandons her and goes to live with her father:

> *"Nay, nay, nay." Mullah Faizullah put his hand on her knee. "Your mother, may Allah forgive her, was a troubled and unhappy woman, Mariam jo. She did a terrible thing to herself. To herself, to you, and also to Allah. He will forgive her, for He is all-forgiving, but Allah is saddened by what she did. He does not approve of the taking of life, be it another's or one's own, for He says that life is sacred. You see—" He pulled his chair closer, took Mariam's hand in both of his own. "You see, I knew your mother before you were born, when she was a little girl, and I tell you that she was unhappy then. The seed for what she did was planted long ago, I'm afraid. What I mean to say is that this was not your fault. It wasn't your fault, my girl."*[58]

By addressing the scene of Mariam's mother's suicide, Khaled Hosseini reveals the secrets hidden in Afghan society, which makes women look inferior, whose words are not heard by anyone and die in complete silence. Looking at the character Nana or the woman who committed suicide, it can be seen that this woman is the one who has an illegitimate child from a well-known capitalist man in society. Although the illegitimate child is the result of the relationship of both parties, and both men and women are responsible enough in this matter, all the responsibilities are only on the woman who gave birth to the child. This, like Spivak's theory, describes two major causes in a different format. Abolition of the victimization of women by a capitalist group and second, the victimization and inferiority of women due to male domination and traditional norms.

At the beginning of the story, Nana's mother is introduced as a poor servant who is rejected by society for having sexual relations with Jalil Khan, the rich man. A capitalist man who defends himself by putting all the blame on a woman. Nana is actually a woman who is condemned to endure patriarchal pressures and also being rejected by society. Because in Afghanistan, the finger of criticism is always towards women than

[58] Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007), 40. Further references to this will be given in text.

men as Nana says to Mariam: “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 the patriarchal society of Afghanistan, it is a common custom to call a child born before the marriage of her parents ‘harami’ or illegitimate child and the woman who gave birth to the child is also called misguided and evil, and women who have an illegitimate child are dragged to death by the men of the society. However, men do not experience any harassment due to the gender superiority given to them by society. Mariam is not exempt from this fate either, five-year-old Mariam does not actually figure out the denotative and demonstrative importance of harami. Indeed, even her mother does not stop torturing her by calling her harami.[59]

Spivak criticizes the patriarchal system and calls it a deceptive strategy. She criticizes patriarchy by dealing with the lives of Hindu widows who climb up from the pile of firewood to burn their dead husbands and sacrifice themselves for it. Widow was called sati in Sanskrit, but the early British colonists translated it as suttee. To Spivak, imperialism presents itself as the founder of the desirable society by supporting women as the object of their protection from the oppression of its own kind. However, the strategy of patriarchy with a deceptive appearance is a gift of free choice for the female subject. Spivak, in her analysis of Dharmaśāstra and Rigveda considers them as origins of her homology of Freud.[60] This is the analysis of a post-colonial woman whose “readings are, rather, an interested and inexpert examination, by a postcolonial woman, of the fabrication of repression, a constructed counternarrative of woman's consciousness, thus woman's being, thus woman's being good, thus the good woman's desire, thus woman's desire.”[61] This is a study about the fate of a loyal widow and how suicide is allowed as well as the manner of issuing a legal permit for the suicide of a widow, and the nature of female etiquette and mourning and honourable mourning. According to Spivak, the appeal of sati was that it was ideologically rewarding and motivating. Just as the attraction of imperialism was that from an ideological point of

[59] Mohammad Saber Wahedi, “Depiction of Women’s Life and Suffering in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*,” *The Refereed & Peer Review International Journal* 8, no. 104 (2021), 43.
[60] Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 299.
[61] Spivak, 299.

view, it was a compelling and stimulating social mission. Today, Sati has become an ideology and is a common name for girls meaning good wife. Between patriarchy and imperialism, subjectification, and objectification, the female face disappears, it does not fall into the abyss of the first era, but turns into a wandering and violent pendulum, which is the displaced image of the third-world woman caught between tradition and modernization. As Spivak brings the reader closer to the answer of whether or not the subaltern can speak: "The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read."[62] Khaled Hosseini clearly shows that women in Afghanistan are a subaltern group that the majority of the violence inflicted on them is ignored by the patriarchal society, and that women are also not able to erase this violence.

Nadia Hashimi also deals with the representation of subaltern women in her novel, which is an important element in the literature of South Asia. In her work, she examines the strong bond between two Afghan women of different generations who share a longing for freedom. The story also explores the themes of sexism, gender subalternity, and the fight of Afghan women against patriarchal standards in the most explicit manner. The experiences of the female characters in the story of their position in the patriarchal society clearly show the social status, disability, violence against women's class, and gender oppression.[63] As Corboz writes, the male-centred fabric of Afghan society is especially visible when we look at the family structure. In Afghanistan, the birth of boys is celebrated with grandeur, a country where women are only responsible for the production of male children.[64] Nadia Hashimi critiques and examines Rahima's mother's part in her novel to demonstrate the extent of male-centered patriarchy in Afghanistan:

[62] Spivak, 308.
[63] Mouloud Siber, "The Intersection of Gender, Disability and Social Status in Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*," *Rocky Mountain Review* 76, no. 2 (2022), 265.
[64] Julienne Corboz, Andrew Gibbs, and Rachel Jewkes, "Bacha Posh in Afghanistan: Factors Associated with Raising a Girl as a Boy," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 22, no. 5 (2020), 590, https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2019.1616113.

> *"If I had a son this would not be happening! Goddamn it! Why do we have a house full of girls! Not one, not two—but five of them!" he would yell. Madar-jan would busy herself with housework, feeling the weight of disappointment on her shoulders.*[65]

The author analyses the abstract patriarchal structures from two separate perspectives: masculinity, which comprises patriarchy in the concept of family, and patriarchy in society or system. The author vividly portrays how the patriarchal system suppressed women and devasted the condition of women in Afghanistan. Regarding the hierarchy of the roots of patriarchy, Nadia shows that the authority of a man is based on the family framework. Most of the scenes in her book show the negative aspects of the fact that the men of the family, in the role of father, brother or husband, do not value the women of the family and make all their life decisions. For instance, in one part of the story, when the girls want to go to school, they are prevented by the father because he thinks that the man of the family has the authority to interfere in the life of the women in the family much more than anyone else.

> *... I wasn't a very brave nine-year-old when it came time to face Padar-jan. I kept my thoughts bottled behind my pursed lips. In the end, Padar-jan decided to pull us out of school again.*
>
> *We begged and pleaded with Padar-jan to let us return to school. One of Parwin's teachers, a childhood friend of Madar-jan, even showed up at the house and tried to reason with our parents. Padar-jan had relented in the past but this time was different. He wanted us to go to school but struggled with how to make that happen safely. How would it look for his daughters to be chased by local boys for all to see? Awful.*
>
> *"If I had a son this would not be happening! Goddamn it! Why do we have a house full of girls! Not one, not two—but five of them!" he would yell. Madar-jan would busy herself with housework, feeling the weight of disappointment on her shoulders.*
>
> *His temper was worse these days. Madar-jan would tell us to hush and be respectful. She told us too many bad things had happened to Padar-jan and it had made him an angry man. She said if we all behaved then he would go back to being his normal self soon. But it was getting harder and harder to remember a time when Padar-jan wasn't angry and loud.* (5)

[65] Nadia Hashimi, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (New York: William Morrow, 2014), 5. Further references to this will be given in text.

Hashimi goes on to criticize the social, cultural and historical constructions that present patriarchy, which are obvious and natural things in Afghanistan. Hashimi sees girls who are prevented from leaving the house at the same time as they reach puberty because the social order in Afghanistan is designed in such a way that the space outside the house is reserved for men, and women are not imagined in public space:

> *Now that we were home, I was given the extra chore of bringing the groceries from the store. My older sisters were quarantined since they were older and noticeable. I was, thus far, invisible to boys and not a risk. … Two weeks into our expulsion from school, the shop owners had gotten to know me. There were not many nine-year-old girls who would walk determinedly from shop to shop.* (5-6)

Now we can look for an answer to the question raised by Spivak in the texts of both authors Hashimi and Hosseini. The outcome of the study shows that women are always at the forefront of every struggle for women's rights and fight for change. According to the structural analysis of the novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it can be seen that Khaled Hosseini wants to portray and convey his idea about how women are subordinated and exploited in the patriarchal culture and how they speak against patriarchy. Hosseini creates the paradigm that women are not always silent and weak incapable and depending on men. The female characters in this novel can break the status, rights, roles, and participation of women classified by patriarchal culture. Although they face problems and even become victims in some cases, they never stop fighting. Therefore, the ability of women to speak out against patriarchy is classified under the feminist attitude. In the novel, Khaled Hosseini portrays two types of female characters in the role of several women. The persona of Nana reveals a woman in between passive acceptance and revelation. Despite her constant criticism of Afghan society's rigid patriarchal system, she accepts the position society places her in, and the discrimination she faces. For example, in a part of the book, it is said that when her daughter Mariam dreams about going to school and getting an education, Nana says that they do not teach the skill of ‘tahammul’ at school:

> *“What’s the sense schooling a girl like you? It’s like shining a spittoon. And you’ll learn nothing of value in those schools. There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don’t teach it in school. Look at me.”*

"Only one skill. And it's this: tahamul. Endure." (17)

Nana's personality constantly talks about his disappointment with men and life. A woman who is angry most of the time curses the children and considers men to be the cause of women's misery: "Nana yelled at the boys as she carried bags of rice inside, and called them names Mariam didn't understand. She cursed their mothers, made hateful faces at them. The boys never returned the insults" (14). However, the answer to the question of whether this height of her anger in front of men will rescue her and her daughter is no. She even restricts her social circle and desires nothing but solitude:

> *Nana made no secret of her dislike for visitors—and, in fact, people in general—but she made exceptions for a select few. And so there was Gul Daman's leader, the village arbab, Habib Khan, a small-headed, bearded man with a large belly who came by once a month or so, tailed by a servant, who carried a chicken, sometimes a pot of kichiri rice, or a basket of dyed eggs, for Mariam.* (15)

In fact, this is what Downing and Roush name Stage I, the passive acceptance of their five-stage feminist identity model. A woman in this stage "carefully selects associates and experiences so as to avoid contact with ideas that may upset her sense of equilibrium as a woman."[66] Mariam is the only one whom Nana can depend on and share her life with. Unlike Mariam, Laila comes from a modern relatively liberal background and has a spirit of freedom. Unlike Nana, who detested male society and never left the house, she loves the outdoors and school and being in society: "For Laila, being out in the streets had become an exercise in avoiding injury" (208).

But where does this spirit of Laila's desire for freedom come from? It goes back to Laila's family system. Laila was brought up in a setting that valued gender equality. Thanks to her educated parents, she has a strong feminist identity and can recognize the advantages of being a woman and never accept unfair treatment. This means that conservative men's oppression of women in Afghanistan starts from within the families, which in some cases, prohibits women from struggle and self-awareness. On the other hand, if this oppression comes from the outside, it can go beyond the traditional gender roles, although this point in Khaled Hosseini's novel has not evolved to the final stage

[66] Nancy E. Downing and Kristin L. Roush, "From Passive Acceptance to Active Commitment: A Model of Feminist Identity Development for Women," *The Counseling Psychologist* 13, no. 4 (1985), 698, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000085134013.

(V), active commitment of the five-stage feminist identity model which "involves the translation of the newly developed consolidated identity into meaningful and effective action."[67]

Hashimi's books represent the battle of Afghan women against the patriarchal system and explore the tensions between feminists and the Afghan patriarchy, as well as the ways in which women use language to contest the monopoly and rules imposed by patriarchy.[68] The most important women's struggle is building their self-consciousness. After all the domination of men, discrimination and mistreatment, oppression and violence that destroys the rights of women, women start to understand that these attitudes are unfair.[69] The first female character of the novel who has self-awareness is Parvin:

> *Parwin was another story. She was striking. Her eyes were not the mud-brown color the rest of us had. Instead, hers were a hazel-gray blend that made you forget what it was that you were going to say. Her hair hung around her face in wavy locks with a natural luster. She was undeniably the best-looking girl in our whole extended family*. (7)

Hamida is another example of braveness in the story, she actually shows the level of strength of Afghan women who even the explosion of war and many rockets in the sky could not stop them from fighting. The author portrays Hamida's character in such a way that she does not move when she hears the explosion and instead tries to help the American woman who is Hamida's teacher and calm her down so that she will not be afraid of the explosion:

> *Sufia had a hand on the door when a large explosion startled us all. We dropped to the ground, out of the way of windows. Nervous stares.*
>
> *"What was that?"*
>
> *"Something. Couldn't have been too far. But it didn't sound like a rocket."*

[67] Downing and Roush, "From Passive Acceptance to Active Commitment: A Model of Feminist Identity Development for Women," 702.
[68] Jibin Monish and M. Kannadhasan, "The Struggle Of Women Against Oppression – A Study Of Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*," *Journal of University of Shanghai for Science and Technology* 23, no. 9 (2021), 1210.
[69] Naily Syiva Fauzia and Anik Cahyaning Rahayu, "Women's Struggle against Patriarchy: An Analysis of Radical Feminism Through Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*," *ANAPHORA: Journal of Language, Literary and Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2019), 2.

> *We were a people of war; explosions were familiar to our senses. But not for Ms. Franklin. Her face drained of color and she was shaking. Hamida put an arm around her young teacher, trying to reassure her. Sufia squeezed my hand. No other sounds came. Sufia got up cautiously and went to the door. People in the street were yelling, pointing. Her driver and guard jogged over to the door. They looked frustrated. They were panting.* (313)

Hashimi depicts Parwin as a woman who lacks household skills but is passionate about painting and teaching. Even though the local boys harass her on the way to school, she still does not stop going to school. Parwin's father stops her from going to school because she is too young, but she never gives up and keeps painting in her small room, she realizes that, unlike Shekiba, she does not want to have her life controlled by others. Parwin paints the wounded face of a dog in the ruins, which represents her understanding of the conditions of Afghanistan and the civil wars in the country, which she expresses through painting:

> *She was completely lacking in social skills. If Madar-jan's friends stopped by, Parwin would shrink into a corner, busying herself with folding and refolding a tablecloth. If she could manage to escape before company made it into the room, even better. Nothing was more of a relief to her than avoiding the traditional three-kiss greeting. She kept her answers brief and all the while kept her eyes on the nearest escape route.*
>
> *...*
>
> *What Parwin lacked in social skill, she more than made up for in artistic ability. She was masterful with pencil and paper. Graphite turned into visual energy in her hands. Wrinkled faces, an injured dog, a house too damaged to repair. She had a gift, an ability to show you what you did not see, even though your eyes graced the same sights as hers. She could sketch a masterpiece in minutes but washing the dishes could take hours.* (7)

The quotation reflects how women try to control the fear they have to cope with difficulties as well as shows a strong determination in how they deal with a hard situation. The next character who struggles against patriarchy in Afghanistan is a woman living in the royal period. Zamarud, a woman who contrary to the Afghan customs and traditions that limit women, becomes a parliamentarian and fights for the

rights and freedom of women alongside other men. She faces several dangers, including death threats from males, yet she never gives up fighting for women's rights:

> *Zamarud? Maybe, but probably not. Too many people disliked her, enough to try to kill her. If they tried once, they would likely try again and maybe succeed. Then it would be the name of a murdered parliamentarian. No, I thought. That wouldn't do.*
>
> *…*
>
> *The attack on Zamarud had frightened Badriya, as it had many other female parliamentarians. Hamida told me two women had decided not to return, afraid that they would be in danger as well. Zamarud was badly hurt, she said. Her wounds had gotten infected and she'd been hospitalized. She was not expected to survive.* (330-332)

Hashimi shows that one woman's bravery can open the way for other women; for instance, Rahima's courage encourages others to fight against oppression. She runs to a shelter and finds safety there. She is not subjected to any restrictions and may live her own life. She is shielded and saved from male dominance since she can accomplish anything without her husband's help.

5.2. Forced Marriage

For women in developing countries like Afghanistan, marriage is a cause of physical and emotional suffering. Women are mistreated in the name of marriage and sold, traded, and exploited as a means of conflict resolution. The real-life incidents described in empirical investigations lend credibility to the fictitious shards of evidence gathered from both works. In Hosseini's works, women are subjected to violence, forced marriages, and other forms of sex discrimination, all of which are reflections of Afghan society.[70] Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* expresses the unspoken narratives and hidden layers that exist in the family, social and individual life of each person in Afghan society. Violence, authoritarianism, coercion, mistrust, polygamy, and, insults and humiliations against women are expressed in this book in a fluent language. In this novel, Mariam and Laila are the two women who marry Rasheed, an unwanted suitor. Mariam is forced to marry Rasheed at the age of fifteen and before

[70] Muhammad Asif, Radzuwan Rasheed, and Mohammad Saleem, "Marriage As An Oppression of Women: An Analysis of Khaled Hosseini's Novels," *Journal of Qualitative Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2020), 7.

puberty by the order of her illegitimate father, Jalil's family. Laila is another woman who is forced to marry Rasheed because she is an orphan and pregnant lady who carries another man's child in its womb.[71] Mariam and Laila are two different characters from two different cities and two completely different families. Mariam, the first character of this story, lives in Herat, the third largest town in the west of Afghanistan. From the perspective of Mariam, Hosseini describes a lady who is compelled to marry a guy of the same age as her father. Mariam has no role and physical presence in this marriage and no decision-making rights. All the decisions are made by the man of the family, and Mariam appears as the bride in the last moments:

> *"Actually, your father has already given Rasheed his answer," Afsoon said. "Rasheed is here, in Herat; he has come all the way from Kabul. The nikka will be tomorrow morning, and then there is a bus leaving for Kabul at noon."*
>
> *...*
>
> *In the morning, Mariam was given a long-sleeved, dark green dress to wear over white cotton trousers. Afsoon gave her a green hijab and a pair of matching sandals.*
>
> *She was taken to the room with the long, brown table, except now there was a bowl of sugar-coated almond candy in the middle of the table, a Koran, a green veil, and a mirror. Two men Mariam had never seen before—witnesses, she presumed—and a mullah she did not recognize were already seated at the table.*
>
> *Jalil showed her to a chair. He was wearing a light brown suit and a red tie. His hair was washed. When he pulled out the chair for her, he tried to smile encouragingly. Khadija and Afsoon sat on Mariam's side of the table this time.* (45-47)

The staging of Mariam's traditional marriage by Khaled Hosseini is also a criticism of the process of traditional marriage in Afghanistan, where the role and satisfaction of a woman are less than that of the mullah of the region. One can only conjecture about the predicament of ladies in a country like Afghanistan, whose male-centric customs are some of the times as unmistakable and cruel as the nation's landscape. It is clear from studying any civilization's history that the clergy is an integral part of that society, and that individuals of all backgrounds and beliefs adhere to this social strata to varying degrees. Undoubtedly, the social life of any society depends on the spread of spiritual

71

values and perfections, and its death depends on the spread of vices and the loss of spirituality. The role of the clergy in the spiritual life of people is an important issue and a tool that can be used to develop the moral values of society. A look at the duties of clerics shows that they, as the guiding group of society, explaining and promoting moral virtues, has been the most important part of their work, and peace and encouraging people to human perfection have been at the top of their work.

In Afghanistan, sad to say, spirituality has a different definition, and the mission of this sacred duty has been entrusted to those who, according to anthropologist Louis Dupree, the people that have the lowest level of education. However, in Afghan society, preaching and guiding the people is done by them, those who do not have any formal religious training. Sometimes advertisements are made for the benefit of the mullahs, which is nothing but falsehood.[72] However, the truth is that in this land, it is enough for a person to have a pulpit in his possession to preach against women through its microphone. The group calls themselves clerics and flag bearers of religion in this country; but unfortunately, they have been the source of many intellectual deviations and anti-women propaganda in the history of this country. On Fridays, which are usually a holiday in Afghanistan, groups of men spend most of their precious time in order to listen to the advice and words of this group. At the end of the day, these men go back to their homes with harsher and more complex faces and tell women about the anti-feminist propaganda of the mullahs and criticize the women. Because there is not a day in the calendar of the gathering of this group when women are not targeted.

In addition to their religious and spiritual functions in the field of propagating and promoting religious affairs, the mullahs play an important role in governance - especially in rural areas. And because of their reputation for piety and faith, they enjoy this role to the best of their ability in society. Therefore, they always express their policy towards women as clearly as possible and no group has the right to reject it; they always deal with more issues that pit men against women than expressing opinions and rulings such as value concepts, the colour of women's clothes, the sound of women's booties, and the shape and hair of women have always been the subject of their critical

[72] Sayed Barez, "Mullahs and Religious Elders Tapped to Promote Women's Rights," *UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*, 1 March 2010, https://unama.unmissions.org/mullahs-and-religious-elders-tapped-promote-women%E2%80%99s-rights.

discussion. The published and unpublished narrations of women always talk about the life of a woman who, regardless of her wishes, mullahs recite her marriage sermon. They arbitrarily write the fate of women with their pens and make them keep a woman in the dark forever. There are cases that show that this group has repeatedly ordered the stoning of women who allegedly had a romantic relationship with a man. In some cases, women's crimes have not yet been proven, and their stoning verdicts are read from the microphones of the same people. This means that mullahs not only do not fulfil the duty of propagating their moral human mission but also have a hand in promoting misogyny.

Although in the novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, all the sisters have experienced forced marriage. However, what makes the subject of forced marriage in this story different from all the stories written on this subject is the forced marriage of underage girls or child abuse. Hashimi talks about the forced marriage of an eight-year-old girl with a ten-year-old boy who are forced to marry based on the decision of their families:

> *"Zalmai, your girls are the right age. Maybe one of them. The older one. She's eight, isn't she?" Kaka Freidun's voice was unmistakable.*
>
> *"Sheeragha's daughter is the same age. And your daughter is the same age as Azizullah's son. She would be a good match as well and would settle our debts sufficiently."* (38)

This marriage takes place because the father is in debt. A father who is unable to pay his debt gives his daughter in return for a loan. Although the man does not want to do this at first, when he sees that he cannot pay his debt, he forces his daughter to marry in an unpleasant custom:

> *"Zalmai, I want you to speak to Azizullah and tell him that his son is still young. God willing, he and his father have long lives ahead of them with plenty of time to arrange for a suitable marriage. Tell him it would be more useful for them to have someone who can help them at home now. Tell him a happy wife bears more sons. Then you can offer Shekiba."*
>
> *"But what if he says no?"*
>
> *"He won't. Just be sure to tell him that she is very capable. That she has the back of a young man and can manage a household. She is a reasonable cook and she keeps quiet, now that she's been tamed. Tell him that it is an honorable thing to take in an orphan*

and that Allah will reward him for bringing her into his home. She will be like a second wife without the price." (38-39)

One of the worst traditions in Afghanistan is that most people look at marriage not as a bond of love and respect, but as a matter of buying and selling girls. In these types of marriages, the fathers or heads of the family, force the girls to marry in exchange for money or land. This custom has its roots in poverty and local tradition. It usually happens in remote areas and villages where women do not have any knowledge of their rights, and only the men of the family make decisions related to them. As mentioned in *An Account of The Kingdom of Caubul*, "to get a wife, Afghans only need to pay money. The common custom of selling girls in Afghanistan is done in two ways."[73] If the girls are adults, that means they have reached the age of at least 14 or 15, and they go to their husband's house after being sold. If the sold girls are less than 15 years old, they stay in their father's house until they reach 15 years of age, and after they turn 15, they go to their husband's house. This custom is more common in southern Afghanistan. The report from Tolo shows that women have been sold since the distant past, especially in the border areas of Nangarhar Province.[74]

The process of selling girls for money and goods has increased after the Taliban militants entered Afghanistan. After the arrival of this group in Kabul, the World Bank blocked millions of dollars related to Afghanistan, and this group also dismissed all the government employees who were performing duties in the previous regime. It was reported that a man sold his eight-year-old daughter to save her from poverty and hunger. This man chose the highest offer among suitors and sold his eight-year-old daughter to him for around 2,300 euros.[75] Rehana Mirzaei, a ten-year-old girl from the ancient city of Herat, is another case of this obnoxious custom in recent years. Her family sold her so that her brother's accident-related blindness could be treated. Hazaras who have come back to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan and live in camps have also recorded cases of girl trafficking. In the meantime,

[73] Elphinstone, *An Account of The Kingdom of Caubul*, 143.
[74] "Trading of Women Rife in East Afghanistan, Report Claims," *TOLOnews*, 30 March 2013, https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/trading-women-rife-east-afghanistan-report-claims.
[75] Robyn Huang, "'I'll Be Sacrificed': The Lost and Sold Daughters of Afghanistan," *Al Jazeera*, 14 August 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/8/14/ill-be-sacrificed-the-lost-and-sold-daughters-of-afghanistan.

the girls who are adults and are aware of the fate of the girls who are sold, oppose this unpleasant custom in the villages of Afghanistan and commit suicide in some cases.

Both authors have their own unique narratives and criticisms regarding the forced marriage of girls. Khaled Hosseini narrates three women who are married to the same man. Besides, they are not dissatisfied with the existing situation, but they also cause the stepdaughter to experience forced marriage:

> *They sat across from her, Jalil and his wives, at a long, dark brown table. Between them, in the center of the table, was a crystal vase of fresh marigolds and a sweating pitcher of water. The red-haired woman who had introduced herself as Niloufar's mother, Afsoon, was sitting on Jalil's right. The other two, Khadija and Nargis, were on his left. The wives each had on a flimsy black scarf, which they wore not on their heads but tied loosely around the neck like an afterthought. Mariam, who could not imagine that they would wear black for Nana, pictured one of them suggesting it, or maybe Jalil, just before she'd been summoned.*
>
> *…*
>
> *"Now he is a little older than you," Afsoon chimed in. "But he can't be more than…forty. Forty-five at the most. Wouldn't you say, Nargis?"*
>
> *"Yes. But I've seen nine-year-old girls given to men twenty years older than your suitor, Mariam. We all have. What are you, fifteen? That's a good, solid marrying age for a girl." There was enthusiastic nodding at this. It did not escape Mariam that no mention was made of her half sisters Saideh or Naheed, both her own age, both students in the Mehri School in Herat, both with plans to enroll in Kabul University. Fifteen, evidently, was not a good, solid marrying age for them.* (42-43)

In contrast to Khaled Hosseini, the sensitivity of the protagonist in Nadia Hashimi's work towards forced marriage is noteworthy. In this narrative, Shaima opposes the forced marriage of her nieces and tries repeatedly to prevent them from their fate:

> *As long as she goes to school, that at least gives her something. At least she'll be able to pick up a book and read it. At least she'll have a chance to know something other than these four walls and the smell of her father's opium."* (107)

5.3. Domestic violence

Gender-based domestic violence stems from a patriarchal system dependent on male supremacy in which women are considered "sub-humans".[76] In Afghanistan, men and boys are considered to be the head of the family and the breadwinner. Women and girls are mainly related to housework and play only one role, which is the role of childbearing, the ideological construction of gender. Limiting women to the home and not giving a role in any social life causes violence against them to penetrate all areas of society. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini shows how decisions regarding women are made without their consent in a male-dominated society. Various forms of violence, such as forced marriage, domestic violence, physical violence and sexual abuse of women, are presented in this novel.[77] Hosseini tells the story of Mariam, who is busy cooking food for her husband in the kitchen, and her hands are shaking for fear that the food might be salty or low in oil, and this may mean another reason for women to be beaten:

> *LATER IN THE DAY, Rasheed was still trying the radio as Mariam made rice with spinach sauce in the kitchen. Mariam remembered a time when she had enjoyed, even looked forward to, cooking for Rasheed. Now cooking was an exercise in heightened anxiety. The qurmas were always too salty or too bland for his taste. The rice was judged either too greasy or too dry, the bread declared too doughy or too crispy. Rasheed's faultfinding left her stricken in the kitchen with self-doubt.*
>
> *When she brought him his plate, the national anthem was playing on the radio.*
>
> *"I made sabzi," she said.*
>
> *"Put it down and be quiet."*
>
> *....*
>
> *RASHEED MADE a ball of rice with his fingers. He put it in his mouth, chewed once, then twice, before grimacing and spitting it out on the sofrah.*

[76] Francis Etsè Awitor, "'Could the Subaltern Speak?" Patriarchy and Gender-Based Violence in Ben Okri's *Dangerous Love*," *Journal of Gender, Ethnic, and Cross-Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2022), 40.
[77] Mahwash Fatma, "Women's Predicament and Harassment in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*," *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (IJTSRD)* 6, no. 5 (2022), 1106.

"What's the matter?" Mariam asked, hating the apologetic tone of her voice. She could feel her pulse quickening, her skin shrinking.

"What's the matter?" he mewled, mimicking her. "What's the matter is that you've done it again."

"But I boiled it five minutes more than usual."

"That's a bold lie."

"I swear—"

He shook the rice angrily from his fingers and pushed the plate away, spilling sauce and rice on the sofrah. Mariam watched as he stormed out of the living room, then out of the house, slamming the door on his way out. (91-92)

In the rest of the story, it can be seen that Mariam is tortured just because the taste of the rice is not according to her husband's desire, and because he finds pebbles in the rice, he throws a handful of pebbles into Mariam's mouth and breaks her teeth:

Mariam kneeled to the ground and tried to pick up the grains of rice and put them back on the plate, but her hands were shaking badly, and she had to wait for them to stop. Dread pressed down on her chest. She tried taking a few deep breaths. She caught her pale reflection in the darkened living-room window and looked away.

Then she heard the front door opening, and Rasheed was back in the living room.

"Get up," he said. "Come here. Get up."

He snatched her hand, opened it, and dropped a handful of pebbles into it.

"Put these in your mouth."

"What?"

"Put. These. In your mouth."

"Stop it, Rasheed, I'm—"

His powerful hands clasped her jaw. He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer.

"Now chew," he said.

Through the mouthful of grit and pebbles, Mariam mumbled a plea. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes.

"CHEW!" he bellowed. A gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face.

Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked.

"Good," Rasheed said. His cheeks were quivering. "Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food, and nothing else."

Then he was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars. (93-94)

From the narration and conversation above, it can be seen that the violence happens when Mariam serves her husband. Mariam brings him the punishment he wants. A sentence such as "his powerful hands closed his jaw" proves that Rasheed physically abused his wife, and the sentence "he forcefully put hard and cold pebbles into her mouth" also expresses physical violence.[78] Rasheed's behaviour and beating of Mariam clearly show that Rasheed is a husband who considers himself the owner of his wife, and whenever Mariam makes a small mistake unintentionally, Rasheed's behaviour resorts to violence. Because Rasheed considers herself the owner of the house, and Mariam a slave who can easily give her orders. From the point of view of men like Rasheed, wives are only for cooking, and if women's cooking is not suitable for men, they can be punished. From the point of view of men like Rasheed, men have the right to punish women whom they see as their subordinates. The narrative also reveals that Mariam is not the only victim of domestic abuse. As the head of the house and the primary provider for his family, Rasheed often mistreats Laila because of her gender. His son is the only member of the family he does not mistreat physically or emotionally since, being a guy, he is given more respect than his sisters.

When it comes to sexual violence, it can be seen that Nana is the first victim in the story to experience sexual harassment and marital rape. In other cases, Mariam and Laila are

[78] Firyal Farah Fadhilah and Tuty Handayani, "Domestic Violence Against Women Portrayed in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*," *Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2022), 18.

also subjected to physical violence and rape.[79] Laila is a girl who was born into an enlightened family. She can read and write. She lost her parents and her entire family due to the civil wars in Afghanistan and the rocket that hit her home. She gets out from under the rubble alive and Rasheed takes her home because he has no one to take care of her. When he goes to Rasheed's house, Rasheed's first wife, Mariam, takes care of her. While she is on the sick bed, Rasheed wants to make her his second wife. When Laila is in a sick bed and her wounds have not yet healed, Rasheed proposes to her and asks her to put a wedding ring on her finger because she is a lonely and homeless woman, and Rasheed considers himself her owner:

> *The next day, Laila stayed in bed. She was under the blanket in the morning when Rasheed poked his head in and said he was going to the barber. She was still in bed when he came home late in the afternoon, when he showed her his new haircut, his new used suit, blue with cream pinstripes, and the wedding band he'd bought her.*
>
> *Rasheed sat on the bed beside her, made a great show of slowly undoing the ribbon, of opening the box and plucking out the ring delicately. He let on that he'd traded in Mariam's old wedding ring for it.*
>
> *"She doesn't care. Believe me. She won't even notice."*
>
> *Laila pulled away to the far end of the bed. She could hear Mariam downstairs, the hissing of her iron.*
>
> *"She never wore it anyway," Rasheed said.*
>
> *"I don't want it," Laila said, weakly. "Not like this. You have to take it back."* (194)

It can be seen that Rasheed gives his first wife's wedding ring to Laila and tells him that Mariam never puts this ring on his finger. This scene shows that Rasheed married both women without their wishes and exposed them to rape. Khaled Hosseini draws the scenes of the married life of Laila and Rasheed, which clearly shows that Rasheed rapes Laila many times, and every time Rasheed sleeps with Laila, she feels disgusted: "He ate, smoked, went to bed, sometimes came back in the middle of the night for a brief and, of late, quite rough session of coupling" (85).

[79] Isam M. Shihada, "Revisiting Women Rights in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*," *International Journal of English: Literature, Language & Skills* 7, no. 4 (2019), 27.

In the following, it can be seen that Rasheed, as the head of the family, not only subjects women to sexual violence but also experiences mental violence. Verbal violence is the expression of insulting comments that are said by a person. Many people who commit sexual harassment verbally, create verbal harassment by asking for sexual relations with unknown people and using rude words in a joking manner. and hurt a person emotionally or psychologically:

> *Rasheed chortled and shook his head, but Mariam thought she saw uncertainty in the way he crossed his arms, the way his eyes shifted. "You know nothing, do you? You're like a child. Your brain is empty. There is no information in it."*
>
> *"I ask because—"*
>
> *"Chup ko. Shut up."*
>
> *Mariam did.*
>
> *It wasn't easy tolerating him talking this way to her, to bear his scorn, his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat. But after four years of marriage, Mariam saw clearly how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid. And Mariam was afraid. She lived in fear of his shifting moods, his volatile temperament, his insistence on steering even mundane exchanges down a confrontational path that, on occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks, and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not.* (89)

In the same fashion, we see violence, stoning of a woman, in Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*:

> *When Shekib had been a girl, she'd heard about a woman in a nearby village condemned to stoning. It was the talk of their town as well as the neighboring towns.*
>
> *The woman had been buried shoulder-deep in the earth and encircled by a crowd of onlookers. When it was time, her father had thrown the first stone, striking her squarely in her temple. The line continued until she slumped over in atonement.*
>
> *Shekiba had listened to the story being recounted by her uncle's wife. Her mouth gaped at the horror of such a punishment and the grains of rice she was sifting fell through her drifting fingers and missed the bowl. An anthill of rice collected on the floor.*
>
> *"What had she done?"*

Her uncles' wives turned around and paused their conversation, surprised. They often forgot she was there. (323)

Feminist theories consider violence as a single phenomenon and instead of classifying it based on types, an effort is made to classify it based on the amount and degree to which violent behaviour helps the survival of the men's surveillance epidemic system. The basic argument in this point of view can be expressed from the perspective of Martin Albrow, who has worked in the violence field for many years. He believes that today's societies' economic and social structure is formed based on the devaluing, inferiority and exploitation of women. Concepts such as battered women or wife abuse should not be considered only at the level of the individual or relationships between individuals, but variables beyond the characteristics of individuals such as the economy, legislators, supervisory institutions and how social services are provided should be considered.[80] The feminist theory proves that violence against women can be in any form, be it in the form of sexual assault, beating, sexual harassment or in the form of pornography, is pervasive and a product of a patriarchal culture where men control both social institutions and women's bodies.[81] Nadia Hashimi writes about the peak of violence against women in such a way that the violence starts from within the family and reflects outside the society.

Our selected novels reveal that women face domestic, physical and sexual violence, harassment, and property rights. however, they are aware of it and fight against it. The two authors describe how female characters respond to violence, whether they fight back during persecution or choose to remain silent, and what kind of freedom they gain after surviving and fighting for their rights as a woman and mothers. In Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns, Mariam always tries not to make mistakes that might make Rasheed mad when he gets home from work. Rasheed's violence made her feel like she was dominating their home life. Rasheed is a strong man and Mariam becomes a docile wife to protect herself from Rasheed's violent attacks. Mariam never went against Rasheed's wishes. In fact, she always tries to prepare everything in the house perfectly for her husband. Since the first time her husband abuses Mariam, she never fights back

[80] Martin Albrow, *Sociology: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2003), 8.
[81] Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Colombus: Ohio State University Press, 1995), 293.

but she looks inward and wonders: “Where did she go wrong when she was abused by Rasheed? Until the day a bomb falls near her house, killing two parents and injuring a daughter, that is Laila. Laila's arrival at Mariam's home is like a breath of fresh air for Mariam. Mariam, a woman who never speaks out in the face of the brutality she has to endure, speaks up this time for her own sex, Laila, and saves her life:

> *They crashed to the ground, Rasheed and Laila, thrashing about. He ended up on top, his hands already wrapped around Laila’s neck.*
>
> *Mariam clawed at him. She beat at his chest. She hurled herself against him. She struggled to uncurl his fingers from Laila’s neck. She bit them. But they remained tightly clamped around Laila’s wind-pipe, and Mariam saw that he meant to carry this through.*
>
> *He meant to suffocate her, and there was nothing either of them could do about it.*
>
> *Mariam backed away and left the room. She was aware of a thumping sound from upstairs, aware that tiny palms were slapping against a locked door. She ran down the hallway. She burst through the front door. Crossed the yard.*
>
> *In the toolshed, Mariam grabbed the shovel.*
>
> *Rasheed didn’t notice her coming back into the room. He was still on top of Laila, his eyes wide and crazy, his hands wrapped around her neck. Laila’s face was turning blue now, and her eyes had rolled back. Mariam saw that she was no longer struggling. 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 twenty-seven years of marriage. She would not watch him take Laila too.* (310)

A Thousand Splendid Suns demonstrates the innate power of sisterhood.[82] In the beginning, these two women have a very impersonal and unfriendly relationship, Mariam never hides her hostility towards Laila, who is her husband's second wife. So, Laila does not share her secrets with Mariam either. Although Mariam accepts traditional gender roles in her marriage, the newcomer serves as another catalyst in her critical sense of feminist identity. Her strong feminist identity and values motivated her to protect another woman from their common husband's abuse. She proves that she is

[82] Farhana Yeasmin, “Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*: A Saga of Afghanistan,” *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)* 8, no. 3 (2020), 388.

willing to fight for the values she already grew up with and believes in it. From now on, the relationship between the two women takes a significant turn and during the usual evening tea in the garden, they become not only friends but also allies they create a sisterhood relationship, which is something they both need. With time, this relationship becomes so strong that Mariam kills her husband to save Laila and accepts the fate of prison. For her defending a woman is equal to freedom, not death and prison.

5.4. Bacha Posh

Nadia Hashimi portrays bacha posh through one of the main female characters. Rahima is a smart girl who goes to school with her four sisters, but her father, who is a traditional Afghan man, is unhappy with this situation because many boys from the neighbourhood always follow them on the way to school and cause trouble. But when the Taliban dominate Afghanistan, women are denied access to school and other sectors, told to remain at home, and forbidden to leave the house unless accompanied by a male relative known as a mahram. This is when the concept of bacha posh arises. So, bacha posh is a quick fix for girls to gain freedom and access to education.

The idea of Rahima becoming a bacha posh is also suggested by a woman who plays the role of an aunt in this novel. She is a single, smart and critical woman who supports girls. In some cases, she is insulted and humiliated even for supporting these girls by the father of these girls:

> *"Damn you, Shaima! Get out of my house! They're my daughters and I don't need to listen to a cripple tell me what I should do with them!"*
>
> *"Well, this cripple has an idea that may solve your problem—let you keep your precious pride while the girls can get back into school."*
>
> *"Forget it. Just get out so I don't have to look at your face anymore. Raisa! Where the hell is my food?"*
>
> *"What is your idea, Shaima?" Madar-jan jumped in, eager to hear what she had to say. She did respect her sister, ultimately. More often than not, Shaima was right. She hurriedly fixed a plate of food and brought it over to Padar-jan, who was now staring out the window blankly.*

"Raisa, don't you remember the story our grandmother told to us? Remember Bibi Shekiba?"

"Oh, her! Yes, but how does that help the girls?"

"She became what her family needed. She became what the king needed."

"The king." Padar-jan scoffed. "Your stories get crazier every time you open your ugly mouth."

Khala Shaima ignored his comment. She had heard much worse.

"Do you really think that would work for us too?"

"The girls need a brother."

Madar-jan looked away and sighed with disappointment. Her failure to bear a son had been a sore spot since Shahla's birth. She had not anticipated that it would be brought to everyone's attention again tonight. She avoided Padar-jan's eyes.

"That's what you've come here to tell me! That we need a son? Don't you think I know that? If your sister were a better wife, then maybe I would have one!"

"Quit jabbering and let me finish."

But she didn't finish. She only started. That night Khala Shaima started a story of my great-great-grandmother Shekiba, a story that my sisters and I had never before heard. A story that transformed me. (12)

The idea of Rahima becoming a bacha posh is also suggested by a woman who plays the role of an aunt in this novel. She is a single, smart and critical woman who supports girls. In some cases, she is insulted and humiliated even for supporting these girls by their father. In the following quotation, it can be seen that all the family members, including the father, agree on the issue of Rahima wearing male clothes, and the mother tries to make her happy with this decision:

"We could change your clothes and we'll give you a new name. You'll be able to run to the store any time we need anything. You could go to school without worrying about the boys bothering you. You could play games. How does that sound?"

It sounded like a dream to me! I thought of the neighbors' sons. Jameel. Faheem. Bashir. My eyes widened at the thought of being able to kick a ball around in the street as they did.

Madar-jan wasn't thinking of the boys in the street. She was thinking of our empty cupboard. She was thinking of Padar-jan and how much he had changed. We were lucky when he brought home some money from an odd job here or there. Every once in a while, his mind focused enough that he was able to tinker with an old engine and breathe life back into it. His small earnings were spent, unevenly, on his medicine and keeping us clothed and fed. The more Madar-jan thought about it, the more she realized how desperate our situation was becoming. (23-24)

Hashimi deals with the issue of the transformation of a girl into a boy, a shocking scene that many girls have experienced. The scene of Rahima's long hair falling on the ground and his grief over losing his hair, added to her girlish beauty. In the scene, she wears her uncle's clothes instead of the girls' coloured clothes. Everything shows that Rahima is not satisfied with this situation, but at the same time, she is forced to accept it:[83]

Madar-jan cut and trimmed, bending my ear forward to trim around it. She cut my bangs short and straight across my forehead. I looked at the ground around me and saw hair everywhere. She brushed the loose strands from my shoulders, blew at my neck and dusted off my back. My neck felt bare, exposed. I giggled with nervous excitement. Only Shahla noticed the single tear that trickled down Madar-jan's cheek.

The next step was my clothing. Madar-jan asked my uncle's wife for a shirt and pair of pants. My cousin had outgrown them, as had his older brother and my other cousin before him. She sent me inside to get dressed while she and my sisters swept my girl hair from the courtyard.

I slipped one leg in and then the other. They were slimmer and heavier than the usual balloon pants I wore under my dresses. I cinched the strings at the waist and made a knot. I pulled the tunic over my head and realized there was no ponytail to pull through after it. I let my hand run against the back of my head, feeling the short ends.

I looked down and saw my knobby knees through the pantaloons. I folded my arms across my chest and cocked my head, as I'd seen my cousin Siddiq do so many times. I

[83] Abbady, "Afghanistan's "Bacha Posh": Gender-Crossing in Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*," 248.

kicked my foot, pretending there was a ball in front of me. Was that it? Was I a boy already? (35-36)

According to all the facts presented, it can be seen that the choice of men's clothing is not the choice of the girls themselves rather, they are forced to choose men's identity by their families. However, in the same cases, the girls also get used to this new way of life very quickly because they get the freedoms they did not have before an example of which can be to prevent forced marriage. This means since they dress like boys and engage in boyish activities during the bacha posh period, girls find it challenging to reclaim their authentic girl selves. Some girls prefer the bacha posh because they get to experience all the freedoms. Therefore, when they transform back into girls, all of their freedom is taken away, and they struggle mightily to adopt womanly traits. For example, in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*, Rahima wants to have the right to ride a bicycle: "I liked feeling the breeze on my face. I liked feeling my legs stretch, trying to catch the others, trying to race ahead of them. My arms swung by my sides, free" (52).

The use of transportation by women in Afghanistan has always been taboo. Apart from the issue of the strict laws of the governments of the time, even in these years of the republic, women could not drive on the roads of Kabul, which is the centre of the city. This means that while the criterion for any issue is the prohibition of the law, and there is no provision in the Afghan constitution to prohibit women from riding bicycles, and the legislator has not explicitly criminalized women's bicycle riding in any of the legal articles, but women cyclists are always ridiculed by men in society.[84] And in some cases, the news of dealing with women cyclists becomes news on social networks. The views of the opponents of women's cycling regarding the reason for their opposition to this issue, they believe that because the bicycle is an open vehicle and women's cycling attracts the attention of men and leads to corruption in society and threatens the moral security and general chastity of the society. In some cities of Afghanistan, the opposition to women's cycling has become such a topical issue that it has been repeatedly raised in official forums and by the traditional spectrum of society, and even some imams of mosques have taken extremely strict positions in this regard.

[84] Fitz Cahall, "Boundary Breakers Afghan Women's Cycling Team," *National Geographic*, 13 November 2015, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/afghan-women-cycling-team.

The ban and negative view of women's cycling is not a new thing. There have been restrictions on women cycling in Afghanistan for four decades. Men have a cold look at women cyclists, and children sometimes ridicule women and throw stones at their bicycles. In the case of urban drivers, they also limit the way for female cyclists and do not allow them to pass. In the case of the views of the traditional spectrum of society with a discriminatory and sexist perspective, women's cycling is considered against public modesty, and the position and manner of sitting on a bicycle saddle is the same as riding and sitting on a horse. From their point of view, this type of sitting is forbidden for chaste women and has no moral aspect. Meanwhile, in many remote districts of Afghanistan, where people do not have access to vehicles, women use horses like bicycles to get around, and they do not notice any obstacles from men. If they use a bicycle, they will clearly experience the duality of views.

In order not to define the discussion outside of the topic, in this part of the dissertation, the discussion returns to the same first point and the key question, whether women remain passive against gender discrimination or take the way to fight it. There are two answers to this question: one is that choosing men's clothing is the choice of women themselves, this means the type of struggle or a change of appearance to stand against oppression if choosing men's clothing for women is forced and imposed, women will be oppressed. For instance, in Homaira Qadri's novel *Dancing In The Mosque* (2020), bacha posh is an imposed culture and Afghan families who do not have male children use this technique to show their neighbours that they have male children because not having sons is considered a defect: "She cleaned her father's store, ran errands to the market, and prayed beside her father at the mosque. The neighbours all thanked God that Omar had at least one son to keep his household bathed in light."[85]

The topic of bacha posh in Nadia Hashimi's novel is completely different from all the novels that have been written on this topic. In the novel both characters live complicated lives under patriarchy; however, by choosing bacha posh they strive to change their destiny and gain freedom. This situation occurred when Afghanistan was under the

[85] Homeira Qaderi, *Dancing In The Mosque: An Afghan Mother's Letter To Her Son*, trans. Zaman S. Stanizai (London: HarperCollins, 2020), 37.

Taliban regime.[86] The Taliban system restricts women's access. They are not allowed to go to school and are asked to stay at home. As a result, Rahima and her sisters have to give up their studies therefore bacha posh can be considered as a resilience against patriarchy. From the perspective of feminist psychology, the term resiliency is essentially tangible because the definition of resilience is the act of coping in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threat, or compelling sources of power such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or financial stress. It gives the meaning of bouncing back from a difficult situation; so, according to the choice of men's clothing in this novel, it is a sort bouncing back a sort of struggle, the struggle against women's illiteracy, the struggle for education, which women could not do openly, started secretly. The purpose of choosing bacha posh in the character of Nadia Hashimi's story is not to show her desire and enthusiasm for male identity, but choosing bacha posh is it is more like a gender masculinity to fight against patriarchy. It would not be wrong to argue that Shekiba's masculinity is nurtured rather than innate because it was not ingrained in her from birth but rather developed as a result of a number of other factors. Shekiba demonstrates masculinity by being tough, independent, brave, strong, and possessing a masculine appearance that makes her appear more like a man.

5.5. Pahstunwali

Khaled Hosseini depicts the issue of women and Pashtunwali in his novel via Rasheed and Mariam. Mariam is a Tajik girl from an enlightened family where her father constantly reads the books of the contemporary Afghan poet Qahar Asi, and her mother is a school teacher and an enlightened woman who encourages Mariam to study. After Mariam is forced to marry Rasheed and live in a Pashtun family, her life changes completely. Like thousands of Pashtun women, she wears a burqa and constantly sees oppression. In the culture of Pashtuns, the wife is the husband's honour and no one has the right to see the woman's face except the husband:[87]

[86] Umme Al-wazedi, "The Trade of Giving Up Being A Woman: A Transnational Antiracist Reading of Nadia Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*," in *Muslim Women's Writing from across South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Feroza Jussawalla and Doaa Omran (New York: Routledge, 2023), 81.
[87] Rasheed Jahan, "Glimpses of Pashtunwali in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* and Ackerman's *Green on Blue*," Master's Thesis, University of Regina, 2018, 54.

Mariam had never before worn a burqa. Rasheed had to help her put it on. The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange seeing the world through a mesh screen. She practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on the hem and stumbling. The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving, and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth.

"You'll get used to it," Rasheed said. "With time, I bet you'll even like it." (65)

In another part of the book, when the Pashtun Taliban order the women to follow the laws of Pashtunwali, the issue of the burqa, which is a culture imposed by the Pashtuns on women, is mentioned again:

Attention women:

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 mahram, 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.

Jewelry is forbidden.

You will not wear charming clothes.

You will not speak unless spoken to.

You will not make eye contact with men.

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

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

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

Women are forbidden from working.

If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death.

Listen. Listen well. Obey. Allah-u-akbar. (248)

In another part of the book, the author divides the Pashtunwali women of Afghanistan into two parts: liberal and tribal. In this section, Hosseini reflects their views and motivations to the extent of the patterns and cultural values of the Pashtuns' social environment. He shows that supremacy, the myth of nervousness and the Pashtun principles of the governor are among the important Pashtun components that have influenced the Taliban and its process of emergence:

> *Women have always had it hard in this country, Laila, but they're probably more free now, under the communists, and have more rights than they've ever had before, Babi said, always lowering his voice, aware of how intolerant Mammy was of even remotely positive talk of the communists. But it's true, Babi said, it's a good time to be a woman in Afghanistan. And you can take advantage of that, Laila. Of course, women's freedom— here, he shook his head ruefully—is also one of the reasons people out there took up arms in the first place.*
>
> *By "out there," he didn't mean Kabul, which had always been relatively liberal and progressive. Here in Kabul, women taught at the university, ran schools, held office in the government. No, Babi meant the tribal areas, especially the Pashtun regions in the south or in the east near the Pakistani border, where women were rarely seen on the streets and only then in burqa and accompanied by men. He meant those regions where men who lived by ancient tribal laws had rebelled against the communists and their decrees to liberate women, to abolish forced marriage, to raise the minimum marriage age to sixteen for girls. There, men saw it as an insult to their centuries-old tradition, Babi said, to be told by the government—and a godless one at that—that their daughters had to leave home, attend school, and work alongside men.* (121)

Nadia Hashimi also expresses the concept of Pashtunwali in a different way in the novel. Hashimi discusses the time when the royal government ruled Afghanistan and the king provided women with freedoms, one of which was the candidacy of women in parliament. However, the tribal factions of authentic Afghan traditions, or Pashtunwali, are against the king's command and order, and they consider it a shame:

> *"They've got five more open seats for the province. The seat from our region needs to be filled. There are a few other powerful men who will be looking to step in and challenge you, Abdul Khaliq, but a woman candidate would be a sure thing. She would take the seat without question because of these stupid rules they've created."*

> *"I don't like this idea. Why should we put a woman in a man's place? And even worse, you're asking me to put my wife in my place? Since when do we have a woman do a man's job?"*
>
> *"I understand that, sahib, truly. And, believe me, I don't like it any more than you do, but these are the rules. I'm simply suggesting we find a way to work around the system so that we don't lose all control over this area. The elections are coming up soon. We must plan for this."*
>
> *"Damn whoever decided on these shameful rules! Telling us we have to have women representatives? They have no business there! Who do they think is going to look after the children then?"* (222)

In another part of the novel, she mentions the Pashtun understanding of honour. This means that if a woman acts against Pashtunwali laws and Pashtunwali tradition, she will be stoned and killed because the woman is considered to be responsible for protecting the honour of Pashtuns:

> *May Allah have mercy on you, Khanum Benafsha!*
>
> *Her body jerked with each stone that hit her. The soldiers took turns. Picking, hurling, and moving to the back of the half circle. Ten minutes passed, a hundred stones. Benafsha's voice grew weaker; she slumped forward, her burqa stained in a dozen places, dark circles bleeding toward one another. The earth around her grew dark as well, blood soaking into the soil. Two stones had ripped through the blue fabric, gashed flesh showed through the holes.* (320)

Several factors are evident in the marginalization of Afghan women in the novels of Hosseini and Hashimi. For example, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* portrays elements such as honouring women, and Pashtunwali oppression at home and in governmental and religious institutions. It also shows how the Pashtunwali code of honour is embedded in other factors that marginalize Afghan women. Nadia Hashimi also narrates the institutions of strict honour laws that are related to the Pashtuns and the Taliban. The marginalization of women and opposition to women being candidates for parliament in the Shahi government, which was ruled by Pashtuns, and the wearing of burqas and honour stoning indicate this in her novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*.

Undoubtedly, the female characters in both novels are aware of what is imposed on them in the name of Pashtunwali culture, and sometimes they raise their voices to fight against gender equality. For instance, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, when Rasheed's second wife Laila hears the new orders and rules for women from the Pashtun Taliban on the radio, she expresses her displeasure to her husband. Rasheed tells her that this is the tradition that people have been following for years in South-East Afghanistan where the Pashtun tribes live. Rasheed's purpose is to follow the traditions of the ruling Pashtunwali:

> *"They can't make half the population stay home and do nothing," Laila said.*
>
> *"Why not?" Rasheed said. For once, Mariam agreed with him. He'd done the same to her and Laila, in effect, had he not? Surely Laila saw that.*
>
> *"This isn't some village. This is Kabul. Women here used to practice law and medicine; they held office in the government—"*
>
> *Rasheed grinned. "Spoken like the arrogant daughter of a poetry-reading university man that you are. How urbane, how Tajik, of you. You think this is some new, radical idea the Taliban are bringing? Have you ever lived outside of your precious little shell in Kabul, my gul? Ever cared to visit the real Afghanistan, the south, the east, along the tribal border with Pakistan? No? I have. And I can tell you that there are many places in this country that have always lived this way, or close enough anyhow. Not that you would know."* (249)

This quote conveys the meaning that some of the cultures ruling women in Afghanistan, despite long-term struggles, have been placed on the margins of all decisions due to the same patriarchal approach existing in the country in recent centuries according to male domination. Since those distant periods, many intellectual and militant women in the country have protested either in groups or individually, and have demanded the strong presence of women in society as another essential and main pillar of the society and the country. However, the big obstacle that has always been there for all these women is the strong opposition of religious scholars and the completely hostile attitude of the majority of men to issues such as the right to education and the work of women. The next issue of the lack of success of Afghan women's struggles is the lack of extensive and systematic international support for Afghan women's struggles. History has shown

that international support is related to the political uses of different countries that support these movements. But what is certain is that even with this point of view, Afghan women have taken advantage of every opportunity to raise their voices from behind the international podiums, but this has not helped much in justifying their struggles. It seems that the Afghanistan issue has lost its importance in the world arena. Many countries are not interested in Afghanistan and the situation of women in this country because it does not bring anything to their benefit.

In two years of hard and breathtaking struggle, women in the paramilitary society and the trench against an armed and violent group like the Taliban have stood alone on their feet. By the forces opposing the Taliban, they have been treated unkindly and beaten. In the last two years, dozens of Afghan women have been arrested by the Taliban forces and mysteriously murdered, but there is still no widespread support for this new movement of justice. The struggle of women in Afghanistan is something more difficult than what the world media shows. In this country, in addition to the fact that women fight for fundamental rights such as the right to work and education, and even the choice of clothing and free access to health services. Women, with all the threats that exist in a militant society, go to the streets full of terrorists without the support of men or international support and they chant "bread, work, freedom."[88] Occupying the streets by protesting women in the last year is a sign of a big change in women's vision and policy towards the Taliban, which no media talks about and no institution supports.

[88] Yogita Limaye and Aakriti Thapar, 'Afghanistan: Women Beaten for Demanding Their Rights', *BBC News*, 8 September 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58491747.

CONCLUSION

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini and *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* by Nadi Hashimi rely on the representation of the voice, agency and deconstruction of common mentalities or structures around women. Both authors describe the lives of female characters in matters such as employment and social activities, financial independence, the right to choose a spouse, and common stereotypes about the relationship between daughter and father, husband and wife, and brother and sister. Both novelists reconstruct the common mentalities of women of the third world. In these novels, the female characters are gender-subordinated by issues such as forced marriage and loss of female identity, being oppressed by the men of the family and patriarchy ruling in Afghanistan. In these novels, gender is brought up against the duality of oriental men and women. Mariam and Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and Shakiba and Rahima in *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* represent an oriental woman who is not oppressed when she lives in her father's house and lives under oppression in her husband's house. The novels also represent the ideology of the Taliban group and describe the psychological, and physical violence against women during the rule of this group.

All the characters in both stories are present in Afghanistan, unlike the female characters in the stories, none of the male characters act as agents, but reproduce the tradition and ideology that prevails in the society. The contrast between urban and rural women is one of the other binary contrasts in these novels. Women are portrayed as victims and oppressed throughout Hosseini and Hashimi’s novels because they live in a culture where the laws that control them are patriarchal ideas. Similar to how Afghan women are portrayed in the novels, Afghan women are reflected in the tumultuous

period when Afghanistan was a result of political instability and are portrayed as docile, male-oriented, and submissive. However, the novels' depictions of Afghan women provide the readers with some fresh viewpoints. In other words, some of these female characters go against the notion that women should be expected to tolerate and bear the exploitation by males in a patriarchal society and bravely fight for their rights in oppressive circumstances.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that female connections and bonding inspire women to challenge patriarchal control and dominance. For instance, in Hossaini's novel, Mariam is depicted as a traditional Afghan woman who is passive, obedient, uneducated and unaware of subordination and equality before knowing Laila. However, Mariam learns about the possibility of gender equality as a result of Laila imparting her education and knowledge to her. Additionally, Laila and Mariam's willingness to express their thoughts, feelings, compassion, and moral support helps to forge their bond and sense of unity over time. At this stage, Mariam's character development can be seen in both her steadfast determination to end the oppression and her very conventional personality of being submissive and obedient. Laila and Mariam's friendship demonstrates that women are always in the position to fight against patriarchal power and end women's oppression despite the chaos and critical time in Afghanistan, especially they are willing to protect themselves and assist in saving others from harm. Finally, the portrayal of both authors' female characters as strong, independent women challenges the widespread misconception that Afghan women are weak, obedient, victimized, and oppressed.

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