

Tribhuvan University

Representation of Contemporary Afghan History in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Letter of Approval

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Abstract

This research intends to investigate Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns from the perspective of New Historicism, focusing on the historicity of text. This paper concludes that the novel reflects on history through the reconstruction of historical events. Hosseini re-examines the history of Afghanistan in about 30-year wars from a new perspective and with a new discourse. The novel represents the plight of the people of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the cold war and the deprived identities of people when the struggle reaches a nightmarish level. Hosseini's work became a medium to understand Afghan culture and tradition. This novel coincides with the main points of New Historicism, based on which this thesis attempts to analyse the historical background, the themes and the characters of the novel.

Keywords: Representation, History, Power, Violence, Discourse

Khaled Hosseini, in his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), peeps into the history of Afghanistan that took place over approximately forty years, from the early 1970s to 2003. Throughout this time, Afghanistan was subjected to a series of violent, brutal wars and numerous political coups. When the story opens, Afghanistan has undergone a bloodless coup in 1973. In 1978, there was a Communist counter-coup, and the Soviet Union invaded in 1979. After battles with the Mujahedeen, or Islamic fighters supported by the United States, the Soviet Union finally withdraws its last troops in 1989 and the Mujahedeen take over. But Mujahedeen, who were divided racially, engage in war. After a decade of bloody infighting, the Taliban take hold of Afghanistan and establish peace but also an extremely strict Islamic Shari'a law. Finally, the book concludes during the American occupation of Afghanistan following the events of September 11, 2001.

Hosseini attempts to anchor the reader in this complex history, by showing how the specific historical events, the departure of the Soviets from Kabul, for instance, affected the lives of characters. The narrator uses chronological history as a reference for the novel's action. Many events in the character's personal lives are tightly bound to political events. By embedding the historical facts, Hosseini helps to show how global and local politics has influenced every Afghan person's life. The present research deals with these interweaving historical facts with fictional narratives. By portraying the social, cultural and economic aspects of Afghan history through the characters, events and setting, Hosseini brings to the surface the history of the common people, women like Mariam and Laila and men like Rashid, who live painful lives.

While the Afghan-born American writer traces the socio-political and cultural history, he challenges the images of his nation associated with the war, racism, religious extremism, gender and ethnic discrimination. In this context, what Hosseini aims to achieve through his fiction is to challenge and subvert this narrow outlook towards his native country. By providing the deep-seated conflicts and problems of the nation, the writer hopes to elucidate the faithful representation of Afghanistan in his novel. Like the lead characters Mariam and Laila, who suffered, endured and resisted the domination and violence of their husband Rashid, Hosseini presents his nation as enduring, resisting and surviving the invasions and wars. While presenting the gender, racial and class discrimination, the narratives reawaken the idyllic history of Afghanistan, through the characters like Babi, father of Laila.

The rationale of this research is to highlight the beleaguered and intensely subjugated living of the people in the backdrop of the political and social conflict and to explicate how the fiction reveals the recent history, social fabric and cultural peculiarities of Afghanistan.

This study aims to facilitate on retaining the identity of Afghanistan and to observe how the power struggle affected the lives of Afghani people. The research aims to understand how fiction helps in representing the cultural, political and social history of Afghanistan. This thesis also explores how the text under study aids in transmitting history and culture.

A Thousand Splendid Suns have received many critical appraisals, since its publication in 2007. Different critics have reviewed the fictions from different perspectives. Rebecca Stuhr tenders to the crux of the novel when she asserts that Hosseini tells the stories of Mariam and Laila, but he also narrates the story of Afghanistan depicting the role and place of women in Afghan society. “The novel

describes a changing Afghanistan, a nation of social, cultural, and economic plurality, a nation that has experienced hostile political disorder, a nation of heritage and history, and a nation of despair and desolation” (Stuhr 47). Hosseini seems to fancy his readers to identify with the creative side of Afghanistan. He rejects the constructed "politicized outlook of Islam which is flaunted depressingly in the West” (Stuhr 64).

Hosseini describes the early years of the two major characters in the novel, Mariam and Laila, to show readers a striking view of Afghanistan during the latter part of the twentieth century. According to Linda Null and Suellen Alfred the novel “is a window into an extremist medieval society that devalues equality, liberty and human rights in favour of hierarchy, control and repression” (125). Antagonist Rasheed is a strong representative of that world who fails to realize that when the oppressor goes too far, whether it be an individual or the state, the downtrodden can rise against the powerful to protect the ones they love, even at their peril.

Afghan expatriate Hosseini constructs his diasporic experience via the fictionalized novel. The diaspora writers, while documenting their physical journey from one geography to another, not only traverse national boundaries, but also ideological boundaries. Rachel Blumenthal points out that their texts uncover new ideological home lands or intellectual and moral regions in which they locate evolving political, theological and social beliefs (252). In this regard, Hosseini confines *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to Afghanistan, interrogating the abuse and oppressive of women within the politically fragile and religiously radical nation.

In order to reconstruct the war-torn, culturally devastated, ideologically shattered space of Afghanistan, Hosseini encompasses ideological home rebuilding in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. His protagonist, Laila, appears in the final scene of the novel as a school teacher. “Open your Farsi books, children,” she says, and so doing,

“ushers in a new, albeit fictionalized, era of ideology rebuilding (home-finding, even), a rebuilding that gains its momentum from within Afghanistan (and the Farsi language) rather than from without, from the west” (Blumenthal 260).

The most prevalent theme in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the discrimination against women. Hosseini is able to attract his readers by exposing the reality of gender roles in Afghan society. Throughout history, men have been categorized as the ultimate race. Men were favoured more, were able to have a better life and were able to do whatever they chose. The power a man possesses in society can be seen throughout the novel. The control and oppression of men over women in Afghanistan are illustrated through the character Rasheed. Nana, Mariam, Fariba, Laila, Aziza and other minor female characters enable the reader to understand the distress and turmoil that women must face daily. Ensieh Shabnirad et al argue that:

The patriarchal factors, which underlies the Afghan public constitution, depict females as subordinated and inferior compared to men in different aspects of social life. The Political institution, tradition and culture are the other factors involved in the oppression of women. Moreover, they commented that the Female characters in the text display assumptions contrary to the western feminism theoretical framework. (244)

They say, the novel depicts women who are in search of their identification as an individual- not simply to be identified as the man’s ‘Other’ - as Simone de Beauvoir argues to be “defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, and to be the incidental, the inessential” (244). They also pointed out that novel shows, how religion, tradition and culture are intricately intertwined in restricting women's power and freedom in social activities. Culture affects this restriction in favour of maintaining honour and reputation for men.

A Thousand Splendid Sun not only includes the story of Afghanistan but also includes the story of the role and place of women in Afghan society. Namita Singh believed the novel traces the history of continuous violence against women. Singh maintains the novel stresses the rights of women were not given along with the restrictions to education, choices and liberation that restrict their great potentials in the male dominated world. Male dominance over the women in Afghanistan is a major concern that relates this novel to the feminist aspect. Another critic Wulandari argues that women have the power to fight back against oppression like Mariam, who remained defenceless but exerts her power in the end, and like Laila who risked defending and resisting all the time.

As most of the reviews revolve around the gender and feminist discourse, the question remains how the popular fictional narratives, as another vivid source of history, represent Afghanistan to the readers. This research, therefore, explores *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as a historical novel authored by Khalid Hosseini, to address the question.

This research pursues to investigate the representation of Afghanistan in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khalid Hosseini. The reason for this investigation is to explore the post 1960 history of Afghanistan through the lens of New Historicism. Emerging and developing in the 1980s, New Historicism is a mode of literary study based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. New Historicists believe in the importance of the literary text, but situate it within its historical context which they think provides more and explicit meaning compared to the text- alone approach. New Historicism does not necessarily deal much with historical facts, because historicists have come to wonder whether the truth about what happened can ever be purely or objectively known.

One major thing about New Historicism is the breaking of barriers separating history and literature since it is difficult to reconstruct the past correctly without bias. New Historicists see texts as agents and makers of history. The distinction between literature and history is artificial and flawed. For them, literature is history and history is literature. It is a “reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of histories” as Montrose points out:

It treats a work of literature not as a story worth of analysis but as a representation of historical forces. Greenblatt, one of the founders, says New Historicism view the work of art itself as “the product of a set of manipulations...the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society.” (12)

Moreover, Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* points out that literature plays a key role in the self-fashioning cultural system of the time, functioning “in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behaviour of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behaviour is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes” (4).

This paper is an attempt to place Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* within the orbit of this theory. Moreover, the current research primarily aims to understand how the fiction helps in representing cultural, political and social history. This thesis also explores how the text under study aids in transmitting history and culture. This paper will be equally critical as well as descriptive in character. It will focus on the descriptive analysis of the characters, events and settings of the novels.

Khaled Hosseini explores the social, historical and cultural forces in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The novel concentrates the construction of historical

understanding. Hosseini views historical understanding in relation to social identity. Fact about Afghanistan is represented in a fictional way. The given historical interpretation of the events problematizes the whole way of constructing the historical vision. No representation is allowed to the condition of innocence. Everything is infected with the influence of ideology and power. The mode of representation has the power to modify reality. It produces that version of reality, which serves as a vehicle of someone else's vested interest.

Owing to the intricate and ambivalent relationship between text and context, there has been a long-running debate about the disciplinary boundary between history and fiction. The history of literary theory can be viewed as a series of theoretical battles between textualism and contextualism. It sways like a "pendulum, with momentary victories to one side or the other, reflecting the oscillation between the verbal-literary champions of textualism and socio-historical champions of contextualism" (Greenblatt 76). New Historicists concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power.

The history here is not a mere chronicle of facts and events. It is a complex description of human reality and the evolution of preconceived notions. Literary works seldom tell readers about various factual aspects of the world. They will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at the time: ideas of social organization, prejudices, and taboos. They raise questions of interest to anthropologists and sociologists. New Historicism is more socio-historical than it is delving into factoids. It is concerned with ideological products or cultural constructs which are formations of any era. So, New Historicists emphasize on the fact that ideology manifests itself in literary productions and discourse. They interest themselves in interpretive constructions. The

following extract of Hosseini's article 'Listen to Women in a New Afghanistan' published in CNN throws light on this sort of subjectively constructed historical truth:

When the Taliban came, they imposed inhumane restrictions on women, limiting their freedom of movement, expression, barring them from work and education, harassing them, humiliating them, beating them. [...] When I began writing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over. Though no one woman that I met in Kabul inspired either Laila or Mariam, their voices, faces, and their incredible stories of survival were always with me, and a good part of my inspiration for this novel came from their collective spirit. (pars. 5)

In the speech given at Book Expo America on 2 June 2007, which is published as the Postscript in the novel, Hosseini tells that the image of the burqa-wearing woman, which becomes familiar and iconic around the world is not the actual image of Afghani women. He recounts that “women in Afghanistan were professors at universities, they were doctors and lawyers, worked in hospitals, taught at schools and played important role in society. But that was in Kabul, and Afghanistan is not a nation of urbanized middle-class people only” (409). There has always been an ideological gap between liberal reformist Kabul and rural Afghanistan. Whereas Kabul has been relatively speaking, a hub for female autonomy, rural Afghanistan, especially south and east along the border of Pakistan, has been traditionally a patriarchal tribal region where men have decided the fates of women. There women have always lived in confinement. They have always worn the burqa on the street and rarely gone to school beyond the age of twelve.

New historicism underlies that the historical events shape and are shaped by the culture in which the events take place. New historicism examines how the textual

representation includes traces and fragments of historical truth in a tacit manner. It also examines how the fragment of historical truth and cultural ethos enter the textual world in microscopic form. The truth, which enters the text in this manner, is subjectivized and textually manipulated. New historicism becomes influential with the works of prominent new historicist, Stephen Greenblatt, who first of all took it to analyse the particular works of the renaissance period. Regarding this, Greenblatt makes the following remarks:

New historicism changes its view to history as objective monolithic, linear, casual, static and authentic and equally views that every text is the product of socio-economic, political and cultural context. Thus, new historicist takes history as a matter of interpretation, perception and it is subjective. So, new historicism, in this way, breaks all the traditionally established facts and proceeds by taking history as heterogeneous, unstable and progressive. (65)

A literary text is embedded in its context. It is in constant interaction and interchange with other components inside the other network of institutions. It believes in cultural power relation and practices. Once spoken or written words enter a form of circulation, it then turns away from their point of origin.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a tale set against the volatile events of Afghanistan from King Zahir Shah's forced abdication to the soviet invasion and later to the reign of the Taliban and the post-Taliban rebuilding. Through his characters, Hosseini introduces the reader to an Afghanistan that existed before the war and beyond the media's twenty-first century coverage of the country. He paints a picture for his readers of land of culture and abundance. As the novel opens, Jalil, Mariam's father, tells her as she sits on his lap that Herat, Mariam's birthplace, "had once been the cradle of Persian culture, the home of writers, painters, and Sufis" (4).

Jalil evokes the glory of the city through its ancient architecture and history. He tells the story of Queen Gauhar Shad who had raised the famous minarets as her loving ode to Herat in 15th century. He impresses Mariam as he describes its current lushness, “the green wheat fields of Herat, the orchards, the vines pregnant with plump grapes, the city’s crowded and vaulted bazaars” (4).

Jalil attests to Afghanistan with its tradition of literature and history of the autonomous rule that precedes the era of the Great Game and the wars yet to come. He tells Mariam about the great poet Jami who lived over five hundred years ago. Laila’s father continues these idyllic history lessons as he relates the story of Afghanistan as a country of poetry and architecture but from the perspective of Kabul.

In order to give the lesson of the rich past of Afghanistan, Babi wants them to “see and feel the country’s heritage” (147). The narrative resurrects the history of Afghanistan before it had fallen under the grip of Islamic rule in the nineteenth century. Afghanistan, today, is represented as an Islamic country, which is the haven for the Muslim hardliners, religious fanatics, jihadist or Taliban. Before that, it was a thriving Buddhist Center.

Bamiyan had once been a thriving Buddhist Center until it had fallen under Islamic Arab rule in the nineteenth century. The sandstone cliffs were home to Buddhists monks who carved caves in them to use as living quarters and as a sanctuary for weary travelling pilgrims. The monks painted beautiful frescoes along the walls and roofs of their caves. Five thousand monks were living as hermits in those caves. Hosseini through character Babi depicts how the Bamiyan in past was:

The Bamiyan Valley below was carpeted by lush farming fields. [...] they were green winter wheat and alfalfa, potatoes too. The fields were bordered by poplars and crisscrossed by streams and irrigation ditches, on the banks of

which tiny female figures squatted and washed clothes. [...] rice paddies and barley fields draping the slopes. It was autumn, [...] people in bright tunics on the roofs of mud brick dwellings laying out the harvest to dry. (146)

This could symbolize that Afghanistan once was a place of peace but now plagued by violence and war. While describing what Bamiyan Valley was once, the fiction depicts the abundance, serenity, natural beauty and peace of his nation. The period predating the Soviet invasion is marked in the novel by a sense of political and social stability. This was confirmed when Nana recounts the birth of the protagonist Mariam which “happened on a damp, overcast day in the spring of 1959, [...] the twenty-sixth year of King Zahir Shah's mostly uneventful forty-year reign” (11). Mariam comes to know the overthrowing of King Shah by Daoud Khan in a bloodless coup in 1973, when her father Jalil reads the clippings from Herat's newspaper, *Iiifaaq-I Islam*, "Anyway, Afghanistan is no longer a monarchy, Mariam. You see, it's a republic now, and Daoud Khan is the president. There are rumours that the socialists in Kabul helped him take power. Not that he's a socialist himself, mind you, but that they helped him. That's the rumour anyway" (23).

Greenblatt recognizes how language keeps readers at a distance from the past. He also draws readers to it in a quest for understanding. Greenblatt points to in his raising of questions about the text's assumptions but does not develop. Greenblatt says that he is "committed to the project of making strange what has become familiar" (8), but he has nothing but an imaginative response. His response is provisional because it is imaginative. He still offers it as some kind of finite explanation. Therefore, one may argue that Greenblatt uses rhetoric to protect such assertions from escape into indeterminacy.

Greenblatt's thesis on self-fashioning in the Renaissance also shows how words are ultimately never enough. The world will not allow identity to be formed through language alone. Action must follow from exhortation. Man must seek to join the signifier with its referent. While Greenblatt draws this important connection between language and time, the temporal problem of history never quite becomes a theme in its own right. Although Greenblatt begins "with the desire to speak with the dead," he admits, "all I could hear was my own voice" (10). However, he believes that the solution to this impasse lies within himself as an historically situated subject saying "my own voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living" (1). It is, of course, a new historicist axiom that knowledge of the world is determined by the position of the observer. In practice, the new historicists require some way out of this impasse.

As Mariam turned 19 on April 17, 1978, a prominent communist leader Mir Akbar Khyber was found murdered. Mariam and her husband Rasheed listened on the radio as people marched against the blaming the murder on President Daoud Khan's government. Laila, the protagonist, is born on the night of the April 1978 coup when the Soviet-backed communist rebel party Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) with MIG planes attacked the Presidential Palace in Kabul and killed the president Daoud Khan and his supporters. Through the radio, the leader of the communist party Abdul Qader announce the "watan will now be known as the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan" (100).

After seizing the power the PDPA began introducing reforms, such as declaring, more or less, a secular state, and declaring that women deserve equal treatment as men. But they met with fierce opposition from many sections of the

deeply religious population. Soviet troops came in to support the PDPA government. The average Afghan began to suffer the consequences. Soon several Islamic fundamentalist groups sprang up and began waging guerilla warfare.

Laila's two brothers Noor and Ahmad left Kabul in 1980 to join the Jihad against the Soviets; the fact that made her mother Fariba carry a lifetime grudge against the Soviets for killing her beloved sons. On the other hand, *Laila's* father admits that women during the communist period were privileged to have their more rights than they've ever had before. He reveals that it is one of the causes of people of the tribal areas especially the Pashtun Region, to revolt against the Soviet-backed communist rule:

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....that their daughters had to leave home, attend school and work alongside men. (133)

The decrees, which the communist government tries to impose, is against their honour and pride and their deep-rooted tradition. Rasheed, a Pashtun, belongs to those men and representative of those conservative forces. While giving a lesson of honour and pride in order to convince Mariam to wear Burqa, Rasheed says he is "a different breed of man, ... Where I come from, one wrong look, one improper word, and blood is spilled" (69).

Rasheed validates this again when Laila expresses her dissent over the Taliban's announcement to enforce the Shari'a law that forbids the women from coming out of their house. Enforcing the Shari'a law is not a new idea that the Taliban is imposing rather it is the customs in many places of Afghanistan. The urban people,

who think they are educated, would not know the lives of rural Afghani people who have been living that way for a long period.

On the other side, there is Laila's school teacher, a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union, who tries to foster in her students loyalty to the Communist nation. She forbids them from covering their heads and calls for equality between men and women. Fariba, who lost two sons fighting against Soviet invaders, is the staunch supporter of the Mujahedeen, the freedom fighter. If not the Mujahedeen risked their lives, they would "all be the Soviet's servant" (Hosseini 174). Even after Mujahedeen turned to warlords and engage in the fight to have their ethnic dominance, Fariba does not want to betray them. In this context, the novel displays differing perspectives towards the Soviet rule, ranging from devoted loyalty to utmost opposition.

Afghanistan got independence from the Soviet but found itself marred by postcolonial condition with dominant ethnic group Pashtun and minority groups Hazaras, Tajik and Uzbeks of the Mujahedeen engaging in the war. Mujahedeen was a mosaic of all ethnic groups of Afghanistan consisting of leaders of the Uzbek, Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara. Hakim, while giving the lesson of history to his daughter, speaks about the tensions between their people-the Tajiks, who were a minority, and Tariq's people, the Pashtuns, who were the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Brushing aside all the rifts created from ethnic rivalry, Hosseini wants his country to be recognised as one nationhood. He speaks out his view from Babi:

To me, it's nonsense –and very dangerous nonsense at that-all this talk of I'm Tajik and you're Pashtun and he's Hazara and she's Uzbek. We're all Afghans, and that's all that should matter. But when one group rules over the others for so long...There's contempt. Rivalry. There is. There always has been. (128)

And that ethnic rivalry resurfaced again among the Mujahedeen and it has its ripple

effect in the house of common people too. The party that was organized in Laila's house to celebrate the victory of Mujahedeen turned into the melee as neighbours branded the leaders of each other's ethnic group traitor. As Hakim pointed out that the "only enemy an Afghan cannot defeat is himself" (138), Mujahedeen "armed to the teeth...found the enemy in each other" (169). The freedom, which seems to be within grasp, is now farfetched and violence becomes their fate.

For Montrose, "all the texts including literary or non-literary are ideological or cultural constructs which should be interpreted according to the particular context" (65). Literary figure invents history based on material reality. In contrast to the traditional concept of objective truth, "singular, objective, monolithic history, new historicism focuses on multiple subjective and heterogeneous histories and challenges to the history constructed by those who are in power" (77).

This new outlook on history also brings about a new outlook on literature. Traditional literary historicism holds that "the proper aim of literary criticism is to attempt to reconstruct the past objectively, whereas new historicism suggests that history is only knowable in the same sense literature is" (88). Montrose lays out that as critics we are historically bound and we may only reconstruct the histories through the filter of our consciousness:

Our analyses and our understandings necessarily proceed from our own historically, socially and institutionally shaped vantage points; that the histories we reconstruct are the textual constructs of critics who are ourselves, historical subjects. Identity is fashioned by social institutions. Literature is another form of social construct, which is produced by the society and in return is active in reshaping the culture of that society. Literature is a cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness. Therefore, social,

political, religious, and economic factors of a given society determine the literature it produces. (23)

For Montrose, contemporary historicism must recognize that not only the poet but also the critic exists in history. The texts are inscriptions of history and representation. They are the interpretation of the texts of the past. Montrose suggests that this kind of critical practice constitutes a continuous dialogue between poetics and the politics of culture.

The violence, in the novel, at times appears overt and physical and at times, it is subtle, complex and psychological. No matter how Hosseini presents the violence in the novel, it is omnipresent, always pulsating beneath the surface of history. The author here tries to recreate the horrors of civil war to advocate human rights amidst the mayhem and mindless violence unleashed by the Mujahedeen and Taliban. The Kabul turns into the battleground of the warlords as the rockets began to rain down and people ran for cover. Hosseini perfectly narrates the helplessness of Laila and the rest of the city after the exchange of the fire:

The whistling. Then the blast, blissfully elsewhere, followed by an expulsion of breath and the knowledge that they had been spared for now while somewhere else, amid cries and choking clouds of smoke, there was scrambling, a barehanded frenzy of digging, of pulling from the debris, what remained of a sister, a brother, a grandchild. (170)

The war empowers Tariq while limits Laila. Tariq, who himself became a victim of war by losing his leg in a landmine, takes on the masculine responsibility of protecting women, particularly Laila. This responsibility gives him confidence, even though he is nearly just as likely to get hurt as Laila is while walking the streets of Kabul. Tariq purchases a gun, a symbol of power, for the protection of her. Tariq

relished on his chivalric duty to accompany Laila. He justifies his buying gun by informing her about the finding of “three bodies in a house in Karteh-She. All three raped. Their throats slashed” (171).

After showing his gun to Laila, Tariq confirms his sense of masculinity by kissing her. War's limiting power over Laila serves to make her even more desirable to Tariq — she needs him more than ever now, not just emotionally, but also as a defender against physical injury. The war acts as another limiting factor in women's lives. In addition to domestic and religious expectations, war keeps women at home. Laila's trip outside the home becomes infrequent until finally she is taken out of school for her own safety. The cruelty of these limitations is enhanced by the fact that in Afghan society, it is men, not women, who decide to wage war in the first place.

Hosseini also narrates how the violence forced the Afghani people to influx into the neighbouring country as refugees, "Laila's neighbourhood had been all but drained of familiar faces. Hasina's family had fled in May, off to Tehran. Wajima and her clan had gone to Islamabad that same month. Giti's parents and her siblings left in June, shortly after Giti was killed" (177). The violence forced many people to leave Afghanistan and take refuge in Iran, Pakistan or India. The refugee camp was no better either. There were sixty thousand Afghans at the Nasir Bagh refugee camp near Peshawar, Tariq accounts. Tariq also retells the horrific condition of the kids who were buried after dysentery and tuberculosis took their lives.

The presence of violence becomes more threatening as the Taliban spring up from madrasas, Islamic schools, of Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan border to takeover Kabul from the warlords. It had as members, young religious students, primarily Pashtuns, with a zeal for religion and the belief that they were ordained to bring stability and the ways of Allah back to their war torn-land. They attacked

corruption, greed and factionalism of the contending Mujahedeen factions inside Afghanistan. They were well received by certain sections of Afghans, initially. This sentiment of optimism is reflected in the words of Rasheed:

They may have no past. ... They may know nothing of the world or this country's history. And, compared to them, Mariam here might as well be a university professor. ... But look around you. What do you see? Corrupt, greedy Mujahedeen commanders armed to the teeth, rich off heroin, declaring jihad on one another and killing everyone in between.... At least the Taliban are pure and incorruptible. ... They'll bring peace and order. (267)

Hosseini's representation aims at supplying the unexamined aspect of the historical reality that can be grasped through a different angle. He reinforces the message of violence by depicting how the common people get killed and suffered unexpectedly and unintentionally. The author uses these events to portray how Afghanistan and her people endured and resisted the war and violence inflicted upon them during the process of nation-building. Many anonymous individuals toil and even lay down their lives in the process and they are neither recorded nor recalled by history. Forgetting the people who lay down their lives is yet another kind of violence, for it obliterates the memory of those, who made modern life possible.

After the Taliban seized power over the government and declared the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the country became a tinderbox due to the repressed freedoms, oppression and despotism. With the enforcement of Shari'a law, they not only started killing "the infidels who commit crimes against Islam" but also began their decimation of Afghan culture and the eradication of what remains of the rights of women to work, be educated, or to move freely outside the home (269). Laila declares that the Taliban are savages. Rasheed, however, denies to take Taliban as savages. He

rather questions why the Soviets, who killed a million people or Mujahedeen, who killed fifty thousand are not savages.

Hosseini demonstrates the narrowness of the Taliban's perspective through his description of the destruction they cause. For them, there are no human rights, only the laws of Allah. The Taliban smash the remnants of the Kabul museum and do away with any aspects of Afghan culture that predate or conflict with Islam. Taliban shut down the university, ripped off the paintings from walls, television were banned, books except Koran were burned. The poems of "Khalili, Pajwak, Ansari, Haji Dehqan, Ashraqi, Beytaab, Hafez, Jami, Nizami, Rumi, Khayyam, Beydel, and more went up in smoke" (273). The Taliban also shut down the cinemas, ransack Projection rooms and set fire to films. The Kharabat, Kabul's ancient music ghetto, was silenced too. Musicians were beaten and imprisoned. In an effort to purge the country of any signs or remnants of secular or western influence, The Taliban also banned television. However, people habituated to television culture resorted to underground bazaars to satiate their pleasure.

To their extremes, the Taliban demolished the two greatest historical artefacts in Afghanistan, giant Buddhas in Bamiyan, calling them objects of idolatry and sin. Despite the pleading from all over the world not to demolish those artefacts, the Taliban "had gone ahead and detonated their explosives inside the two-thousand-year-old Buddhas. They had chanted *Allah-u-akbar* with each blast, cheered each time the statues lost an arm or a leg in a crumbling" (306). By this destruction of the past, the Taliban hoped to recreate history for their country. They want to make Afghanistan a pure Islamic state governed by Shari'a law.

The result is compromised form of discourse. The indication of subjectivity is no more than one element of complex rhetoric that struggles after more objective

truths. Greenblatt is correct to say that "self-expression is always and inescapably the expression of something else, something different" (56) in that he recognizes how any utterance is implicated within other structures of power culture and so on. However, the link to the past is always one of the projections of the self within the self.

New historicism is a theoretical approach that developed as a reaction to new criticism and other objectivist theories. It seeks to examine a text in terms of the fragmented trace of historicity. It is hidden beneath the layers of textual details. New Historicists concern themselves with "the political function of literature and with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves" (Montrose 76). The history here is not a mere chronicle of facts and events. Rather it is a complex description of human reality and the evolution of preconceived notions.

According to Montrose, "Literary works may or may not tell us about various factual aspects of the world from which they emerge, but they will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at the time" (76). New Historicism is more socio-historical than it is a "delving into factoids: concerned with ideological products or cultural constructs which are formations of any era" (77). New Historicists insist that ideology manifest itself in literary productions and discourse. They interest themselves in the interpretive constructions, which the members of a society or culture apply to their experience.

A New Historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context. He or she examines how the writer's times affected the work. The work reflects the writer's times. Hosseini has explained how the Afghanistan became a hot spot following the September 11 World Trade Center bombings. The United States accuses Osama Bin Laden, leader of another extremist Islamic group Al Qaeda, of the crime and

demanded that the Taliban hand over him. The Taliban, in response, refuse to relinquish Bin Laden because he is a guest and it is against the code of ethics to turn over a guest. Soon the United States declared the war against Afghanistan and “armed the warlords once more and enlisted the help of the Northern Alliance to drive out the Taliban and find Bin Laden” (374). The Northern Alliance succeed in taking Kabul and the Taliban had to retreat. All the while the people of Afghanistan continued to suffer. When Tariq says the bombings by the US and its ally is not so bad hoping the peace would be restored, Laila denounce the idea of war by saying:

Not so bad? People dying? Women, children, old people? Homes destroyed again? Not so bad?"...."After the so-called blunder in Karam? A hundred innocent people! You saw the bodies for yourself!" ...I know war. I lost my parents to war...And now to hear you say that war is not so bad? (375)

The author here denounces any kind of war as many father and mothers were killed from a rocket making many girls and boys orphaned. It is perverse and hypocritical not to oppose war as hundreds of innocent people lost their lives. Though it is right for the United States to bombard the hideouts of Bin Laden, it is not justifiable to kill people who have no concern to terrorism.

New historicism focuses not only on discourse, power and truth but equally on marginal issues. It critically analyses the narrative of high politic and deconstructs the hierarchy existing in history and foregrounds the suppressive hierarchic existing in history and foregrounds the suppressive hierarchical narrative of the marginalised group like women, poor, working-class people and so on. The historical narratives of some groups are becoming more and more numerous such as those of women and the colour of people.

Discourse is the Foucauldian concept in which he connects the ideas of knowledge and power. Discourse is a discipline, which departs away from the linguistic concept of the structuralist, formalist and communicative approach. The Foucauldian idea of discourse is such an approach which, "gears towards a counter-reading of historical and social condition. Discourse creates the power, which ultimately creates knowledge that is truth. Discourse is always in the process of formation, correlation and transformation, which take place after a certain event.

The subjectivity of selfhood is guided by ideology formed in society. Subjectivity is shaped by and shapes the culture into which the subject is born. Individual identity is not merely the product of society. Neither is it merely a product of individual will and desires. Instead, individual identity and cultural milieu reflect and define each other. Foucault attempts to trace the proximity between the thematic of repression and microphysics of power.

The way power operates subtly and silently is dubbed by Foucault as the microphysics of power. Any cynical notion of power hardly fits into the procrustean bed of microphysics of power. Foucault projects the disembodied and diffused notion of power:

First and most generally, power is not simply punitive- it does not just deny, silence, restrain. Power can also be productive; a purely cynical form of power would never last. Although we have come to accept confession as a liberating revolt against the silence of the Great Repression, confession is itself a form of the subtle working of power, one that in fact promotes discussion and analysis of sexuality. (1)

What is required is not a theory but rather an analytic of power. It must free itself from the juridico-discursive representation of power. This power governs both the

thematic of repression and the theory of the law as constitutive of desire. Foucault's explanation for the popularity of the judicial notion of power neglects everything. It makes for its productive effectiveness, its strategic resourcefulness. Power is only accepted as a pure limit set on freedom. It is a capping of freedom.

A Thousand Splendid Sun is also the tale of the person who lived outside the margins of the dominant culture. Hosseini depicted the marginalised voices of women, who are dominated and oppressed by the Patriarchal society of Afghanistan. The novel also portrays the resistance and the endurance of the Afghani women to the violence and oppression imposed on them through their culture, norms and principles of their community. Aptly dedicated to the women of Afghanistan, the novel delivers a heart breaking portrayal of the women characters, Nana and her daughter Mariam as well as Laila and her daughter Aziza, with the central characters being Mariam and Laila.

Nana, being a poor servant epileptic girl, is ostracized by society for bringing disgrace, whereas Jalil Khan, the rich businessman defends himself by putting the entire blame on her. He could have easily taken her as his fourth wife but he did not, since she was his housekeeper with a disease. And marrying her would have a stain on his pride and honour. Nana advises her daughter Mariam quite early in the novel, “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).

Mariam was born a harami, which means an illegitimate child. The tag remained attached with her name throughout her life, for no fault of hers. As it is mentioned, “She understood then what Nana meant, that a harami was an unwanted thing; that she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate

claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance”

(4). Her father Jalil acknowledges his daughter’s birth but he does not dare to embrace his daughter into the fullness of his prosperous household; instead, he consigns her and her mother to the outskirts of the town in Kolba what could be described a little more than a shack. An illegitimate child and the mother are treated with contempt by society, whereas the man is found, if not innocent, then at least not guilty, in the court of public opinion. Women are held responsible and must pay the price, for the man’s misdeed.

Foucault did not believe there was any purpose for society and all laws are unnecessary. Foucault takes man and woman simply as the effects of prevailing social practices, codes and disciplines. Since no normative or natural code exists to guide man and his collective activities, human beings find themselves in deadlock if they are solely driven by Foucauldian thought. If a sovereign power or sovereign state exists, only then the question of overthrowing it with a suitable alternative comes. Foucault delivers the following views regarding how thought of Foucault weakens the power of revolution:

It is precisely the idea of society as a system, a set of institutions that must give way to something. To abolish power systems is to abolish both moral and scientific categories. Man is a free human subject, is a subject of a certain sort, naturally good, warmly sociable, kind and loving. Men and women are always social creations, the products of codes and disciplines. (61)

Man and woman is the product of social relations. They happen to get new insight and vision to go against the establishment and status quo. The same system gives birth to a new consciousness, which is subversive. This question deserves deeper contemplation.

Foucault has not given an explanation about how a new vision and idea arise against that very system out of which these new vision and idea arise. Foucault's thought does not inculcate belief in the possibility of revolution. Those who want to launch a revolution should have a firm footing in normative principles. But Foucault has already sabotaged normative values. Foucault's thought does not seem to be conducive to revolution.

Rasheed, the representative of the conservative patriarchal force, in the capital city Kabul takes women a mere object to fulfil men's sexual gratification. Though he condemns the modern women for violating the honour and pride, Rasheed's lust for them is revealed when Mariam finds out the magazine with nude women in his drawer. And this is justified by Mariam herself, considering that his needs are different since he had lived a solitary life after the demise of his first wife and son. Mariam has compromised with Rasheed's sensuous inclination and does not question his behaviour.

Besides, his marriage to the city girl Laila, who he compares to Benz is a fulfilment to his craving to lay them and tame them. Rasheed even resorts to conspire in conveying false news of Tariq's death to Laila, so that she does not have any options other than to marry him. He brings pride and honour once again to "legitimize the situation" as it is "dishonourable, an unmarried young woman living here. It's bad for my reputation" (208). He justifies marrying an underage girl by saying that his mother was fourteen when she had him.

Hakim, in contrast to Rasheed, treated her wife Fariba with respect and care. Hakim lacks the normal Afghani male role with his "delicate hands, almost like a woman's" (98). This description enables one to see that Hakim was not a man of malice or violent discipline. He was not familiar with ordinary tools and spent more

time absorbed in books. Hakim is not repulsive when Fariba accuses him of their sons' death in Jihad. Instead, he is visionary and is articulate enough in motivating and shaping the personality of his daughter Laila. He does not give in to the devastating conditions in Afghanistan; he rather expresses his anguish over the prejudices of the ethnic Mujahedeen and Taliban regarding gender.

Hakim teaches Laila her responsibilities as a citizen towards a land torn between foreign insurgencies and ethnic groups within the nation. He instils in Laila's mind that the nation cannot see progress when half of its population is subject to exploitation and violence. "Society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila. No chance" (114). He can be viewed as a person with modern thoughts and as a person having faith in his daughter who would contribute to the rebuilding of the nation.

Fariba, too, does not serve the role that a typical Afghan mother pursued. She was defiant and "ferocious" when angered. Fariba took to laying in her bed on most days. Laila was responsible for completing chores and preparing meals that her mother seemed incapable of doing. The timid Hakim did not bother Fariba to get out of bed. In this relationship, she held the power. Although Fariba possesses the ability to act on her own, she is crushed by losing her two sons in jihad. It is this loss that forces her to disregard any duties, including being a mother to Laila.

In a society where men are regarded as superior to women, the girl would inevitably be the child first considered to be given away. She is of less value to the household than the boy, who carries on the family name, can financially support the parents in the future, and performs other useful tasks.

According to Foucault, power is not always repressive; it bears the qualities of productivity and creative potential. It is not the ruthless domination of the weak by the

strong. For him, power does not move in one direction instead, it circulates to all directions to and from all social levels all time. Power is a never ending process and is always in the way of formation. In this regard, new historicist has a great affinity with Foucault as he states:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere. Power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relation serves as a general matrix-no such duality extending from the top down. There is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. Where there is power, there is resistance. This resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. One is always inside power. There is no escaping it. (95)

From this definition of power and its scopes, it is obvious that power does not get percolated hierarchically. It subverts the traditional concept of power as the only tool for subjection and domination since it turns the negative concept of power upside down. Power is all-pervasive and deserves equal weight.

The Taliban impose even greater hardship on Afghan women, as evidenced in the novel than that previously inflicted by war and repression, by denying them freedom to wear what they want, to work outside of the house and to walk alone.

Under the Taliban, the laws are different for men and women:

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 circumstances, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If

you do not, you will be severely beaten. Women are forbidden from working.

If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death. (270-1)

In resistance to a decree of the Taliban, Laila makes several attempts to meet Aziza in the orphanage. When spotted without a male companion, Laila is often given a tongue-lashing, a kick in the rear and sometimes slaps and fists came on her. But Laila never loses her hope and despite beatings makes several attempts to meet Aziza.

Mariam who takes endurance as her weapon to defend the violence of Rasheed finally resorts to killing her husband by hitting him with a mere garden implement. Mariam appropriates the same tools of violence that have been employed against her. Defending another woman against the onslaught of a man in this way is a direct challenge to the authority of Rasheed and other men generally.

After having killed Rasheed, Mariam sacrifices herself by remaining in the house while allowing Laila and her children to flee Afghanistan. In her childhood, Mariam is never able to forget her inferior place in society, and her abuse at the hands of Rasheed reinforces her dim view of her self-worth. By excising Rasheed, Mariam realizes—just before she is executed—that she has finally attained emotional transcendence:

She thought of her entry into this world, the harami child of a lowly villager, an unintended thing, a pitiable, regrettable accident. A weed. And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at last. No. It was not so bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way. Not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings. (361)

Though her physical death is imminent, Mariam's own refusal to submit to misogyny,

and the flame of resistance to it, burns eternal. During Mariam's trial, a Talib judge expresses some empathy for her situation, but states he must send her to her death, "I want to be merciful. I want to forgive you. But when God summons me and says, But it wasn't for you to forgive, Mullah, what shall I say" (356)?

Thus, Hosseini has been successful in drawing attention to the appalling suffering of those without a voice, which would otherwise remain out of sight and out of mind. Social constraints are tested and the legitimacy of those holding authority in the culture is examined. The perspective and experiences of those subjugated by society are brought to light.

Discourse is produced in a struggle between internal and external. It is used to gain and sometimes to subvert the power position in discursive hierarchies that can change with one discourse taking over the supreme position of another. So, he is interested in the process of how discursive practices changes over time. He rethinks the concept of discourse as designating not merely knowledge and disciplines but also transformable units of history. The discursive practices, however, have no universal validity but are historically dominant ways of controlling and preserving social relations of exploitation. All discourses are the production of power. Discourse moves in as the flows of power. It cannot move outside the limits of power. Discourse, for Foucault, is interpretation. Complete interpretation is impossible. Foucault believes that discourse are deeply rooted in the social institution and that in other words power function just in presence of knowledge and truth. All sorts of disciplines like social, moral, religious and political control the space of discourse. Discourse means to achieve power. More than this discourse cannot be separated from power.

The novel also highlights the plight of a country lost in the aftermath of the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States as they seek to have their

control over the world. The Soviet Union ruled by Communist funded and provided military assistance to the communist parties around the world. In opposition stood the United States, a capitalist state that extended military and financial aid to anti-communist sides in order to contain the power of the Soviet Union.

The two super powers never engaged in the war directly but were involved in a proxy war to contain each other. When the struggle for hegemony reaches a nightmarish level, the people are deprived of their identities. So happened in Afghanistan. The intervention of the Soviet to help communist ruler in the Afghanistan and the United States “shipping the Mujahedeen Stinger Missiles to down the Soviet helicopters” and “Muslims from all over the world joining to fight jihad” (111) has not led to the betterment of the Afghan people. The communist in Afghanistan does not want their invasion called the April coup rather term it as an “inqilab, revolution, an uprising of the working people against inequality,” and termed the war with Mujahedeen as “skirmishes against troublemakers stirred by foreign provocateurs” (111).

The American backed jihad has been successful to drive the Soviets back to their own frontier and “the Soviet Union crumbled with astonishing swiftness...Babi was coming home with the news of the latest republic to declare independence. Lithuania. Estonia. Ukraine. The Soviet flag was lowered over the Kremlin. The Republic of Russia was born” (157).

Even after the Soviets lost the war and returned home, the jihad has not ended the sufferings of Afghani people as they continued to be victims of the crossfires and landmines. The Soviets are gone but the guns provided by CIA are still there to open fire against the innocent people. The jihad changed into the civil war but Americans were not there to help the Afghani people as they were there to dispel the Soviet.

Their interest in Afghanistan was over with the exit of the Soviet (206). Afghanistan also became a playground of foreign powers. Even the Taliban, who were depicted as the servant of Allah only, turned into the puppets of the foreigners. During their visit to the Intercontinental Hotel, Rasheed tells Mariam to "Meet our *real* masters, Pakistani and Arab Islamists. The Taliban are puppets. *These* are the big players and Afghanistan is their playground". Taliban are also allowing the Pakistani and Arab Islamists "to set up secret camps all over the country, where young men were being trained to become suicide bombers and jihadi fighters" (300). By giving shelter to Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban once again invites the wrath of the USA and the coalition forces pushed back them to the Pakistani borders and the mountains in the South and East Afghanistan.

To encapsulate, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* juxtaposes real events of the late 20th century Afghanistan history with fiction. In this novel, Hosseini has chosen the well-known historic events of politics. While recreating the history of contemporary Afghanistan and the painful life of the women of a nation, Hosseini revisits the history by partaking in the process with the women. He fictionalises history by relating to the plight of the women, both emotionally and rationally. He successfully portrays the existence of violence on both political and social level. The novel has depicted the violence has been used as the major tools to maintain power. While the civil war swept up the Afghanistan, the people continued to suffer. The sufferings of the Afghani people have been rightly depicted in the story of the fictitious characters of Mariam and Laila. Giving detailed information on the ignored culture of Afghanistan, Hosseini aims to present his people as they are, in contrast with the West-oriented narrations.

Hosseini chooses the women characters to bring the marginalised issue to the front. The women were trapped in a forbidding society and were forced to be slaves to the male gender, without a say or an opinion towards anything. The emotional identification with the sufferings of the women and the rational identification against the exploitation of the women make the novel *A Thousand Splendid Sun*, a socio-historical documentary on the lives of women in Afghanistan in the late twentieth century. Furthermore, the novel also sheds light on how the discourse of religion, modernity, patriarchy and culture rule the Afghan people. The issue of ethnicity is also at work to create discourse. The study discloses how the global and local powers establish discourse to rule and exploit the Afghan people. The discourse of hegemony, modernity, religion, ethnicity, patriarchy and local cultures to rule the people of Afghanistan. The novel also depicts the resistance to the various power discourse prevailing in Afghanistan. Consequently, Hosseini succeeds in his goal by bringing out an alternative history to the countless previous texts and archives and forming the base for New Historicist analysis as the narrative of the other.

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