

**Tribhuvan University**

**Critique on Dominant Culture: Representation of Islamic Women in Afghan Culture  
in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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**By**

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Ms. Rajju Phasikawa has completed her thesis entitled "Critique on Dominant Culture: Representation of Islamic Women in Afghan Culture in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*" under my supervision. She carried out her thesis from 12, June 2016 to March 2017. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted to viva voce.

.....

Sarbagya Raj Kafle

(Supervisor)

Date: .....

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**Approval Letter**

This thesis is submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Ms. Rajju Phasikawa entitled "Critique on Dominant Culture: Representation of Islamic Women in Afghan Culture in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*" has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis Research Committee.

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## Abstract

This thesis analyzes Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to show how it critiques the dominant Afghan culture in relation to the representation of Afghan women. The dominant culture in the name of religion has affected the life of women. The major women characters in the novel, Mariam and Laila suffer in the male dominated culture. In order to prove this claim, this paper employs the theoretical concept of Sarah Franklin's "Feminism and Cultural Studies", and Kandiyoti Deniz's "Bargaining with Patriarchy", Beauvoir's "Women as Other", Stuart Hall's notion of representation, Gramsci's notion of hegemony and so on.

Key words: representation, feminism, ideology, patriarchal domination, hegemony

Critique on Dominant Culture: Representation of Islamic Women in Afghan Culture  
in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

This paper is an attempt to investigate the role of culture in the representation of the women's identity in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Afghan women's identities are created by the culture, and the Afghan culture seems to be in the favor of men. The Afghan culture subdued the position of women. The society is male chauvinist society where women are exploited and discriminated. This research concentrates on the major two women characters, Mariam and Laila, whose identities are oppressed by the culture have their unidentified subjectivity. They are not treated as human being rather they are treated as the server of men. The religion or the culture has also signified that the wife must be obedient and loyal towards their husband. They must be sincere and follow what their husbands say to them.

Women are dominated in patriarchal culture. In Nepali culture too, women are also considered to be the follower of men. In their marriage ceremony, women have to treat their husband as a God to whom they have to show their respect and honor diligently. Similarly in Christian culture, the holy book *Bible* has clearly mentioned that Eve, the female creation of the God, has to obey and serve Adam, the male creation, for her life time. Trying to be specific, this research highlights the Afghan culture in respect to the overall representation of women.

This paper focuses the oppression and exploitation made upon three different women characters; Nana, Mariam and Laila who suffered because of the religion and culture followed in male chauvinist society. Jalil and Rasheed in the novel are the true representation of the Afghan culture. They are the dominating factors of the religion, culture, tradition and custom practiced in Islam.

Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* deals with the plight of women in

Islamic society. The novel begins with the story of Mariam as a bastard child who suffers in the male dominated society. She suffers under the brutality of her husband Rasheed. Mariam loves her father but in return of that she is not looked and cared by her father. Her father treated her as a burden. So he tries to sort out these things making his daughter marry with the dominating character Rasheed. At the beginning, her married life seems quite good, but later on, after her miscarriage, she is treated very badly. She was treated as an object to produce baby and the servant to perform the work continuously. The first part ends with the suffering of this female character in the male dominated world.

Similarly Laila in the second part of the novel also suffers in the male chauvinist society. Laila, in her childish life has no worries and tensions. But after she gets married with Rasheed, her life becomes pathetic. She has to remain away from her nearest and dearest because of the war (Taliban). Laila happens to have a tragic end in her life because she loses her parents in the bomb blast and also gets separated from her lover, Tariq. After that, in order to survive and to make her baby survive in the world, she gets married with Mariam's husband Rasheed. After her marriage, she gives birth to her first baby girl named Aziza. This baby is not liked by Rasheed and demands for baby boy. After some years, she gives birth to a baby boy. Rasheed shows the partiality between these two children. He always prefers to have his son. He fulfills his son's all demands though their condition is pitiable.

Towards the end, Laila encounters her first love Tariq at her own house. Then Rasheed starts suspecting her and beats her violently and wildly. Mariam protects Laila from Rasheed hitting her at the back of the head. Laila runs away from there with the help of Mariam. Mariam sacrifices her life for the sake of Laila's life.

The researchers of the world have been attracted towards the numerous

possibilities of this novel. So the study upon this novel has already been made by different researchers. Namita Singh examines the issue of gender equity in her article “Feminism v /s Gender Equity: Socio- Political activism in Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*”. She writes:

Gender equity has always been associated with feminism. Feminist strongly believes that women and men should have equal rights.

Women that are deprived of their rights do not understand they are indeed a feminist during the process of fighting for gender equality.

Afghan women are one such case who are directly or indirectly

fighting for their rights that make them a feminist in or other way. (1)

The research signifies that the novel has been examined through the feminist perspectives. Mariam and Laila, in the novel, are unaware that they are feminist. It is because that these characters in the novel are deprived of all sorts of rights and freedom. These characters at the end of the story present themselves as feminist going against the domination who are suffering for ages.

Similarly, another critic Asma Arshi in her review “Countering Marginality in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” mentions that the major character Mariam has been presented as a protagonist from her final act of sacrifice. She, in the novel, has been presented as:

... is the personification of altruism, self- sacrifice, as well as valor and courage. She is a character who becomes a role model for reader

because of her devotion and sacrifice for the people she loves. It is she who sacrifices her life for Laila’s good later in the novel. She is now

surely He is Mighty, the great Forgiver consumed by guilt, because of her being an illegitimate child, and it seems to influence much of her



life. (4)

In her review, Arshi has countered the prevalent marginality in respect to the women's condition in the society. She examines the character, Mariam in respect to the courage, self-respect, and valor who has been represented as a heroic figure in the state of countering the domination and marginality that has deeply rooted in the male chauvinist society.

In the same way the other critic Linta Waftan Hidayah in her thesis "Aggression and Domestic Violence Based on Frustration- Aggression" in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* tries to show that the aggression in domestic violence, described in the novel is based on frustration aggression hypothesis. Based on researcher's finding and data analysis, there are various aspect of aggression-frustration. The aggression that can be applied in this novel is domestic violence that is applicable in case towards the life of Mariam in the novel. She has become the victim of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, intimidation, economic deprivation, and threats of violence. (5)

In the same way, Jennifer Reese from *Entertainment Weekly* dubbed Rasheed as "one of the most repulsive males in recent literature" (n pag) and added that with the exception of Tariq, "the male characters seem either unrelentingly evil or pathetically weak" and opinionated, "If a woman wrote these things about her male characters, she would probably be blamed as a male-hater (n pag)."

The another critic Michiko Kakutali in her article "A Women's Lot in Kabul, Lower than a house Cat's" has mentioned that "This heavy handed opening gives way to even more soap-operaish events: after her mother commits suicide, the teenage Mariam- the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy man, who is ashamed of her existence is quickly married off to a much older shoemaker Rasheed" (n pag). It states that the

suffering of the protagonist is because of the fear of surviving lonely.

In the above mentioned reviews, Singh and Arshi have dealt with the issues of equity and countering marginality. Both of these issues advocate for the upliftment of the status of women. Singh, in her research, primarily concerns with the disguise form of Feminist in the state of suffering of women. Similarly Arshi advocates for the courage and altruism provided to the character Mariam in the novel. The voice is necessary in order to counter the action being laden to the women. She highly emphasizes upon the countering marginality in respect to feminist attitude. It looks same in general but they are partly different while being specific.

After viewing the different reviews of different researchers, it is clear that the present research departs itself from the researches made by others. The present research primarily focuses on critiquing the dominant culture while representing the role of women in the society. The society has played the politics in the representation of women in the name of culture, religion, custom and tradition. The present research examines the condition of women in the male dominated society in respect to the dominant culture prevalent in the society.

The research claims that the culture which is termed, as 'a way of life', has politically played the role in suppressing marginalized people. Culture, in general, refers to those qualities and attributes that seem to be characteristics of all humankind. Culture is a person's belief or behaviour. Culture refers to the language, beliefs, values and norms, customs, dress, roles, diet, knowledge and skills and all the other things that make up the way of life of any society.

As the research investigates the role of dominant culture in the society, we need to have a surficial knowledge regarding this term. Dominant Culture of a society refers to the main culture in a society that has been deeply rooted in the society. This

culture is shared and accepted, without opposition, by the majority of the people. So based on this definition, the research paper tries to present the consequences of patriarchal dominant culture that rules over the marginalized group, i.e, Muslim women, in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini.

Cultural Studies is not a theory itself. It borrows eclectically from different theories. So while studying cultural studies, it should be studied under other different theories. To examine the novel in respect to the cultural point of view, different theorists have been brought to prove the claim. This paper will be sustained in the cultural studies frame, drawing on the concept of Simon de Beauvoir's "Women as Other", Daniz's Kandiyoti's "Bargaining with Patriarchy", and Sarah Franklin's "Feminism and Cultural Studies: Past Present and Future", Stuart Hall's notion of representation, Gramsci's notion of hegemony and many others as the sources of examining the research.

The primary aim of studying Feminism in Cultural Studies has been highlighted by one of the critics Sarah Franklin in her studies in "Feminism and Cultural Studies: pasts, presents, futures". Franklin mentions that one of the primary aims in bringing together feminism and cultural studies, is to consider the significance within feminist theory and politics of questions concerning the cultural dimensions of gender inequality and Patriarchal Power (267). Feminism, in Cultural Studies, helps the women to examine how culture has played the role in finding out the inequalities prevailed in the male dominated society.

Beauvoire's ideas from her essay "Women as Other" has been brought to analyze the claim made by the research. The essay thoroughly examines how the gender role of the society and the culture is responsible in the formation of the female's identity. The essay highlights upon the formation of the gender in the

patriarchal world. In the essay, she states:

[w]hereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: “You think thus and so because you are a woman”, but I know my only defense is to reply: “I think thus and so because it is true,” thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of question to reply: “And you think the contrary because you are a man,”... Woman has ovaries, a uterus, these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature... thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being. (208-209)

From the above citation, it tries to explore how the subject of woman is not the matter of discussion in relation to the larger concept of humanity. It further states that women’s status is simply the object of the oppression. The essay highlights upon the definition of women in relation to men. It helps to examine how the female characters in the novel has been treated as other. Their existence in the novel are subdued by the male. In the novel, we find that the women’s existence in the society are for the welfare of the male.

In the same way, Antonio Gramsci’s notion of ‘hegemony’ highlights the claim made by this research paper. Gramsci’s term hegemony refers to consensual leadership of the supreme class or group over the allies and friend group. This theoretical methodology can more be understood through the ideas put front by Gramsci’s hegemony. Gramsci in his book *Prison Notebook* states that:

two great “stratums” can be constructed within superstructure; “civil

society” which is, in popular language, a strata that can be called as a totality of private organizations, and “political society,” in other words, a state strata, which corresponds to the functions of direct domination of dominant group who expresses itself in the state or in the legal execution with their function of “Hegemony” above all society. (318)

In the above citation, it states that the civil society and political society placed on the level of superstructure. Civil society and political society create hegemony. The people out there show their consent without any disapproval of the law of the society.

Similarly, Deniz Kandiyoti in her essay, “Bargaining with patriarchy” explains that the society where the classic patriarchy prevails, undermines the existence of women. The word patriarchal bargain is coined by the feminist Kandiyoti which refers to the conformity of the demands of patriarchy for their own benefits. This notion can easily examine in the character Laila in the novel. In order to highlight this notion, she has brought the concept of classic patriarchy. She states:

Under classic patriarchy, girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband’s father. There they are subordinate not only to all the men but also the more senior women, especially their mother- in- law. The extent to which this represents a total break with their own kin group varies in relation to the degree of endogamy in marriage practices and different conceptions of honour. (278)

Their life in the classic patriarchy is not only undermined by the men but their life is also subordinate by the senior women in the family members. So they easily consent upon the patriarchal ideology in order to hold the position and power ahead in the future.

In the same way, John Storey's *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* examines how the different cultural analysts have presented the role of culture in the society. Culture varies from society to society. The culture has been studied by many different theorists. Raymond Williams is one of them. William suggests four current meaning of culture in John Storey's *Cultural Theory and popular Culture* which defines culture as "well liked by many people, inferior kinds of work, work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people, culture actually made by the people for themselves" (21). The fourth meaning favoured by Williams can be taken as the concern of this paper. The paper highlights how the culture made by the people for themselves has undermined the status of the women in society. William suggests "we can identify different moments with in a popular text or practice- what he calls 'dominant', 'emergent' and 'residual'- each pulling the text in a different way" (21-22).

This paper also tries to show how the gendered regime of representation works. Stuart Hall's notion of stereotyping can be applied in order to examine the dominant culture exists in Afghan society. The word 'Stereotyping' described by Hall can be stated as:

Stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature ... its practice of 'closure' and 'exclusion'. It symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong ... it tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power ... power/ Knowledge sort of game. (258-259)

The definition provided by Hall can easily be applied in the novel. The major women characters in the novel have been stereotyped as 'few, simple excluded, essentialist'

and provided unequal distribution of the power. With these features of Hall's notion, it can be analyzed how Afghan Women in the Afghan Culture are suffering thoroughly.

In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, we examine the women are stereotyped as “emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive”, whereas men are considered as “rational, strong, protective and decisive” (Tyson 85). In the novel, Mariam has been presented as a weak and submissive character who does not even stand for her own pride. In the same way, Rasheed and Jalil are the characters who represent the characteristics of being rational, strong, protective and decisive. The Afghan culture is highly covered with traditional gender roles.

The dominant culture as evident in the novel highlights the patriarchal domination. The major characters, Mariam and Laila in the novel, suffer from the ideology of the male dominated society. One of the theorists John Fiske in the work of ‘Popular Culture’ examines that ‘Culture is neither aesthetic nor humanist but political’ (6). Fiske tries to show how the definition of the culture has been modified in the contemporary world, though it has retained its aesthetic value in its own way. This definition highlights its importance on the study of women's suffering because of the male dominated society in Afghan Culture. Raymond Williams' definition of culture, “the whole way of life” has seem to be problematized in the contemporary world. The culture is political and seems to be in the favor of the benefits of men.

In the novel, we encounter with different sorts of examples which highlights the culture as a political term. In one of the situation, Rasheed admits that “where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only” (63). This dialogue spoken by Rasheed claims that the society is completely theirs and there is no access for women. If they want to be the part of this society, they must obey what the men

say to them. Wearing burqa in Afghan patriarchal Culture snatches away the freedom of women to live freely. In the novel, Mariam for the first time wears Burqa after her marriage with Rasheed. She feels so uncomfortable in this appearance though she has to modify herself in this attire as it is one of the renowned culture in Islam. Muslims' identity is based on this culture. This action can be marked in the novel as:

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. (71)

The culture of wearing burqa in Afghanistan has directly influences the life of women. They inhabit it as if it has become the part of their own life. They never express their sufferings rather they hold as the part of the culture. In the name of culture, they are being dominated and they consent it without any disapproval in it.

Gillian Whitlock in her article "The Skin of the Burqa" reflects upon the use of Burqa in Afghan Culture. She states:

Afghan feminist activists do use the burqa strategically. Quite literally so- messages, weapons and banned publications were transported beneath its folds during the Taliban regime. Feminist activists in Afghanistan were quick to adopt the burqa as a shroud of anonymity and disguise. For these reasons, the burqa is a complex symbol. It is a reminder of an oppressive regime, but it is also an icon of brave and successful resistance. Many Afghan women will choose to sustain the burqa as a powerful symbol of nationalist and feminist resistance, and



many feminist activists will question the uses to which the figure of the burqa-clad woman is put in the west. (54-76)

With the above mentioned lines, it portrays that the burqa used by the Afghan women is the indicator of both the oppression and resistance. The perception of west upon the Afghan women in regard to this costume is the oppressive one whereas the Afghan Feminists perceive it as a strategy to resist against the domination and so on.

Unfortunately, Mariam, like many of the female in the middle to low classes in Afghanistan, is forced by her husband to wear a burqa. This sort of rules and norms are not there for the upper classes. The compulsion of wearing burqa in the novel can be highlighted when Rasheed says:

The women come uncovered; they talk to me directly, look at me in the eye without shame. They wear makeup and skirts that show their knees. Sometimes they even show their knees. Sometimes they even put their feet in front of me, the women do, for measurements, and their husbands stand there and watch. They allow it... They think they're being modern men, intellectuals, on account of their education, I suppose. (63)

Men in the middle classes to low classes feel that the so called modern women for Rasheed are morally corrupted women. He believes that they are bad and immoral. They do feel as though they are not able to handle the women being more outgoing and approachable than themselves. Because of this insecurity, they force women to wear burqa. It makes them feel as if they are dominant and have power to control something.

Michael Foucault's in one of his interview advocates that one's domination on other shows one's lack of a correct knowledge of one's self. The excess of

aggressive behaviour and need for self- reassurance lead many of the men to demand their wives wear burqa in public.

The risk of dominating others and exercising over them a tyrannical power only comes from the fact that one did not care for one's self and that one has become a slave to his desires. But if you care for yourself correctly, i.e. if you ontologically what you are, if you also know of what you are capable, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen in a city... If you know what things you must fear and those that you should not fear... if you know finally, that you should not fear death, well, then, you cannot abuse your power over others. (8)

Foucault shows that the domination upon somebody is a lack of a correct knowledge. Rasheed whose first job after marriage is to make Mariam wear a burqa is ignorant about his own egoism and narrow- mindedness.

Thomas R. Bates in his article "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony" mentions that, "the basic premise of the theory of hegemony is one in which few would disagree: that man is not ruled by alone, but also by ideas" (351). The ideas overruled upon the people's mind that they consent upon the things without any opposition.

Similarly, John Storey in his book, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* defines the concept of hegemony used by Antony Gramsci refers to "a condition in process in which a dominant class does not merely rule a society but leads it through the exercise of intellectual and moral leadership" (79-80). Hegemony involves a specific kind of consensus: a social group seeks to present its own particular interests as the general interests of the society as a whole. In this sense, despite oppression and exploitation, in a high degree of consensus, a large measure of social stability, a

society in which subordinate group and classes appear to actively support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meaning which bind them to incorporate them into the prevailing structure of power (qtd in Storey's *The Practice Of Cultural Studies?* 80). The concept of hegemony is the dominance of one culture or group of people over another through consensual terms. In this study, it is the hegemony of men and ideology of patriarchy in society.

Similarly, Patriarchal culture is deeply rooted in Afghan women's mind in such a way that they cannot come out from it. They have assimilated it as a part of their life. They could not resist themselves from these sorts of things. The novel depicts a situation where one cannot resist how culture has constructed one's identity. It maintains the cultural significance in the novel as such:

“God help me, I think I love you,” he said. Through chattering teeth; she asked him to turn out the lights. Later, when she was sure that he was asleep, Laila quietly reached beneath the mattress for the knife she had hidden there earlier. With it, she punctured the pad of her index finger. Then she lifted the blanket and let her finger bleed on the sheets where they had lain together. (214)

The aforementioned lines prove that the Afghan women have a kind of superstitious belief. It describes that in the very first night of their sexual intercourse, the spot of the blood on the bed sheet proves that the woman is virgin. The culture has played a very partial role in the context of presenting oneself as an inferior being (women). Rasheed who has already married two wives before Laila does not need to prove anything. They do not need to justify themselves because there is nothing as such being mentioned in the Afghan Culture. So the culture in this context dominates women.

In the novel, after Jalil's illicit relationship with Nana which results in the birth of Mariam, Jalil blames Nana and disowns her because his honour in the society would be harmed. On this, Nana tells Mariam:

You know what he told his wives by way of defense? That I forced myself on him. That it was my fault. Didi? You see? This is what it means to be a woman in this world... Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always, you remember that, Mariam. (7)

In the novel, the main character Mariam represents the character as hegemonically suppressed in the patriarchal ideology. They know that they are being suppressed but they consent with such ideology. So the power of men have made the women feel as inferior being and they are always in the need of men's support for their existence.

In the dominant patriarchies, women also seem to be internalizing the essentialist patriarchal customs which traps them further in the web of marginalization. Reflecting on this, Kavita Punjabi argues:

The social demands of the women, the social construction of what a feminine identity should be, make vulnerable to internalizing guilt, whereas the former the feminist identity that addresses the needs of women, makes it possible for them to deal with both the superimposed and the internalized guilt. (*Aman n. pag*)

The dominant culture has constructed the society in such a way that demands the women to internalize their guilt and determined the feminine identity that it should be by the patriarchal dominant culture.

One of the theorists Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* highlights that the oppressed feels afraid of their own oppressed group. It is because

of the fear for the freedom. They want freedom but at the same time, they also have a fear that they might have to suffer a lot. He mentions, “Moreover their struggle for freedom threatens not only the oppressor, but also their own oppressed comrades who are fearful of still greater repression” (n pag). This signifies that they have been waiting for the freedom as a gift from the oppressors which seems impossible to get as such. In the novel, the female character Mariam is yearning for the good and productive life without performing any revolutionary act. She in the whole novel internalizes her guilt for not giving a birth to a child. She feels if she raises voice against her husband then her life will be even more difficult to survive. They consent upon the patriarchal oppression in order to survive in life. Laila another female character gets ready to get married with three times older man only for the sake of her baby in order to make her survive in the world.

Ideology has different meaning. Among them the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser has also provided the meaning of ideology. Storey examines the definition of ideology as “the practices of everyday life, ... certain rituals and customs ... binding us to the social order: a social order that is marked by enormous inequalities of wealth, status and power” (20). The patriarchal ideology has dominated the society in such a way that the women feel that they can do nothing in their life without the support of the male. In the same context, even her mother Nana sees no purpose of education. She rebukes Mariam for even thinking about education: “What is there to learn? ...what is the sense schooling a girl like you? It’s like shining spittoon. And you’ll learn nothing of value in those schools. Look at me only one skill. And it’s this: *tahamul*. Endure (18). When Mariam refuses to marry the forty years old Rasheed by telling her to act rationally accepting marriage. “Now be reasonable, Mariam. You can’t spend the rest of your life here. Don’t you want a

family of your own? You have to move on” (47). This seems reflective of the roles assigned to women in the patriarchal order.

Patriarchy as ideology presents the ideals at different times throughout history and in a variety of societies, that men and women are expected to conform to. Women have been objectified, treated according to their roles, denying them their own perspective, feelings and opinions, unless they conform to those of patriarchy” (Tyson 90-91). Because of patriarchy, a woman is considered the other, defined by her difference from male norms and values, defined by what she (allegedly) lacks and the men (allegedly) have” (92). Through the male gaze, being society’s self- proclaimed universal perspective, society and its inhabitants are interpreted in life and literature (Tyson 84-88). This is the norm that dictates human life.

The novel highlights the situation where the patriarchal ideology has formed the roles of women. In the novel, it states:

Mariam and Nana milked the goats, fed the hens, and collected eggs.  
They made bread together. Nana showed her how to knead dough, how to kindle the tandoor and slap the flattened dough onto its inner walls.  
Nana taught her to sew too, and to cook rice and all the different toppings: shalqam stew with turnip, spinach sabzi, cauliflower with ginger. (Hosseini 15)

The aforementioned lines try to signify that the religion has guided the Islamic women in a way that they have to learn something not for them but for others. They spend their most of the time remaining in the kitchen in order to impress their husband with good cooking. The women are idealized from their early start of life making them realized that they should devote their life making their husband happy all the time.

Women in the novel have been represented as the one who seems powerless. In the novel, Laila after the death of parents, she has no other option except marrying Rasheed whose age is four times that of her. She has undergone through this situation because she believes that she can do nothing without the support of male on her life. So in this way she seems hegemonically oppressed of patriarchal ideology.

According to Miriam Cooke, “Arab Muslims have been left out of the history, out of the narratives of emigration and exile, out of the physical and hermeneutical spaces of religion... Muslim women do not challenge the sacrality of the Qur’an, but they do examine the temporality of its interpretation” (111). Islamic women in the Afghan society are double marginalized.

Bhabani Shankar Nayak in his article “Challenges of Cultural Relativism and the Future of Feminist Universalism” writes the way our societies deals with men and women. He states:

The character of a man is evaluated not by his conduct in family morals, but by his efficiency in work, by his intellect, his will, his usefulness to the state and society, but for women, it is all about her loyalties and “display of “good morals” in sexual and family life... economic subjugation of women is impossible without the bourgeois hypocrisy and its narratives of moral values; a mechanism of control life, labour and society. Patriarchal cultural norms are constructed to uphold structures of power that are detrimental towards the emancipation of women in general. (85)

From the above highlighted notion on patriarchal ideology, it clarifies that the norms and customs are created in order to show the hierarchy of the power. The dominant culture defines the characteristics or the features of men as a superior and powerful

being and at the same time women as an inferior being who should devote their life for the family norms.

The emancipation of patriarchal cultural norms in the society can be viewed in the novel as well. Mariam, in the novel has adopted this emancipation easily. It can be viewed from the action she performs in the novel.

With each disappointment, Rasheed had grown more remote and resentful. Now nothing she did pleased him. She cleaned the house, made sure he always had a supply of clean shirts, cooked him his favorite dishes. Once, disastrously, she even bought make up and put it on for him. But when he came home, he took one look at her and winced with such distaste that she rushed to the bathroom and washed it all off, tears of shame mixing with soapy water, rouge, and mascara.

(98)

These lines advocate that the wife should make husband all the time happy. They should be morally good presenting themselves as a dutiful wife. In the above lines, it asserts that the character Mariam is attempting her best to please her husband Rasheed. She feels guilty of not being to make her husband happy. She tries to make herself beautiful only for her husband. When her husband denies to have a graceful look upon her, it seems to be a great grief for her. These thoughts in her mind has been rooted because of the patriarchal cultural dominance.

The French Feminist writer Simon de Beauvoire while explaining the hierarchy of sexes in “Women as Other” has expressed that “This has always been a man’s world” (93). and has claimed the fact that women are considered weak and of inferior productive capacity because she has remained in bondage to life’s mysterious processes and so man has failed to recognize in her being like himself. Beauvoir



observes: “One is not born a woman but becomes one” (301). and with this aspect she tries to explain that sex and gender are two different aspects. The notion of Beauvoir applies to another major character Laila in the second part of the novel. She was presented as a strong character but after the death of her parents, she was modified and has been termed as a submissive, docile character.

Beauvoir’s notion of gender and sex as two different aspects have been misunderstood by the Afghan Culture. They believe that women from their birth are physically weak, submissive, and docile and so on. In the novel, the women characters have been misrepresented as a different being who even do not belong to the part of the society. The paper tries to highlight how the Afghan Culture has stereotyped the role of women. The culture did not allow them to live freely in nature. They always have to present themselves as an inferior being. The women in the male chauvinist society are presented as an animal. It can be viewed by the brutal action performed by the male character Rasheed:

He shook the rice angrily from his fingers and pushed the plate away, spilling sauce and rice on the sofrah ... he snatched her hand, opened it, and dropped a handful of pebbles into it ... 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 mumbled a plea ... “CHEW”! he bellowed. (102-103)

The above extracted lines from the novel highlights the Afghan women are brutally treated in male dominated world. Rasheed who termed himself as a superior being showed his superiority upon inferior being. The act was so violent but Mariam did not even resist against it. She was presented as a helpless being.

One of the writer Nawal El Saadawi in her book, *The Hidden Face of Eve*

mentions:

A girl who does not preserve her virginity is liable to be punished with physical death, or moral death, or at least with being divorced if she is found out at the time of marriage... yet such a girl may be completely innocent of any sexual relation, but incapable of proving her innocence... is due to the fact that patriarchal class society has imposed premarital virginity on girls and ensured that the very , honour of a girl, and her family, is closely linked to the preservation of this virginity. (41-42)

These lines in the book clarify that the norms and customs are meant to be followed by the women only. Rasheed, who had already married for two times did not need to prove his virginity whereas Laila, the innocent has to prove her virginity in front of the one who himself is not virgin at all. This can be taken as an oppression made upon women in the name of dominant culture.

Similarly, the physical violence of Rasheed in the novel has been tolerated by the character Mariam in the novel. In the novel we find that there is no refuge, no sanctuary in her life with Rasheed because of

his scorn, his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat ... Mariam saw clearly how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid ... she lived in fear of his ...volatile temperament, his punches, slaps, kicks and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not. (97-98)

Mariam in the novel feels unsafe with Rasheed. She is always tortured and violated by Rasheed. Rasheed pours his aggression and anger at her. The women in patriarchal ideology have been treated as a puppet with whom men can do anything they like to

do. There is no respect and honor for women in the world of men. Men in their world always want to be superior and powerful. They want to rule against the powerless.

In respect to another character, Laila, in the novel has also been presented as a docile and meek character. She has been presented in the novel as if she is nothing in the absence of the male character Tariq in the novel. She in the novel wants to be protected from the bad boy Khadim, where she explains: Oh, Tariq jan. Oh, won't you come home and save me from the badmash! (116). She has been presented as a helpless character. It can be viewed from the action performed by her. After she has been teased physically by the bad boys. It states:

she turned around and, howling, ran home. SHE DREW WATER from the well, and, in the bathroom filled a basin, tore off her clothes. She soaped her hair, frantically digging fingers into her scalp, whimpering with disgust. She rinsed with a bowl and soaped her hair again. Several times, she thought she might throw up. She kept mewling and shivering, as she rubbed and rubbed the soapy washcloth against her face and neck until they reddened. This would have never happened if Tariq had been with her, she thought as she put clean shirt and fresh trousers. Khadim wouldn't have dared. (117)

In the above mentioned lines, it clearly signifies that Laila in the novel needs a man to help her out from the bad boys. Tariq in the novel is a crippled boy although she expects support from him. It highlights that men though they are physically weak, they are not inferior to the physically capable women. Crippled men are even more capable in compare to the physically well women.

In Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today*, it has been stated that "Beauvoir maintains that women should not be contented with investing the meaning of their

lives in their husbands and sons, as patriarchy encourages them to do” (97). It has also mentioned the idea of Jennifer Hansen who observes, “Beauvoir strongly believed that marriage... trapped and stunted women’s intellectual growth and freedom” (2). The Feminist Beauvoir believes that the women are being suppressed from their own religion, class, or race.

In the novel, the character Laila after marriage seems to be contented in the lives of her husband and her children. Before her marriage, she is totally a different character. She is strong and free to do what she desires. She is not interfered by any members of her family. She is a carefree person who later on becomes a docile character after her marriage.

As Wenon Giles and Jennifer Hyndman argue in their book, *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zone* argue, “gender relations and identities are first deployed in sites of militarized conflict first to incite, exacerbate and fuel violence” (4). The gender relation in the novel has clearly been viewed because of the violence occurred in Afghanistan. It is mentioned in the novel that women know nothing about the context of the war. Mariam is unaware about the war going on in Afghanistan. She was not let to know the situation of the war going on. This is also because of the deprived of education of women. This can be viewed in the novel when Mariam asks:

“What’s a communist?” she asked. Rasheed snorted, and raised both eyebrows. “You don’t know what a communist is? Such a simple thing. Everyone knows. It’s common knowledge. You don’t... Bah. I don’t know why I’m surprised.” Then he crossed his ankles on the table and mumbled that it was someone who believed in Karl Marxist. “Who’s Karl Marxist?” ...“You know nothing, do you? You’re like a child. Your brain is empty. There is no information in it”. (97)

From these extracted lines, we can say that the women's status in Afghanistan is very pathetic. They are unaware about the things that are currently happening in the world. They are ignorant. Though they show their eagerness to learn something, they are looked upon as a dumb. From this situation, it can be highlighted that the education plays a vital role in the formation of one's identity.

Mariam, Nana, Aziza are all victims of a male chauvinist society where it is desirable for a woman to be pretty, fair, beautiful and elegant. This attitude upon male can easily be examined from the dialogue delivered by one of the male dominated character Rasheed. He asserts:

Rasheed: "It's not your decision. It's hers and mine."

Mariam : " I am too old for you to do this to me."

Rasheed : " Don't be so dramatic. It's a common thing... your own father had three wives. Besides what I am doing now most men I knew would have done long ago. You know it's true." (192)

From the above mentioned lines, it makes us clear that the dominating attitude of men has no guilt for committing such crime rather they feel pride on it. There is nothing such a bad in performing such activities. They take this as a very common thing which is easily acceptable in the society. On contrary, if this action is performed by the women then they would not be allowed to stay in the society. This would be a great crime where there is no way out.

When Rasheed came to know about the relationship between Tariq and Laila and their meeting for almost all day made Rasheed violent and shows his anger upon Laila saying:

"Shut up, you", Rasheed snapped, raising a finger. He turned back to

Laila. "Well Laila and Majnoon reunited. Just like old times." His face

turned stony. "So you let him in. Here. In my house. You let him in. He was in here with my son."... "AND YOU DIDN'T LIE TO ME?" Rasheed roared. "You think I didn't figure it out? About your harami? You take me for a fool, you whore?" (329)

The language being spoken by Rasheed is very harsh. He is passing his judgement that the married women cannot make any relation with other men. The harsh words like 'Whore' has been passed on to this woman though she was guiltless. It is common for the men to have more than one wife but it is a sin and crime for the women if they even dare to talk with other women after the marriage.

The society has been constructed in such a way where man has right to punish a women of his household as he sees proper without any interference from law. The perfect example in the novel is the scene when Laila speaks to an officer about returning home and asks if he will protect her from her husband he responds, "What a man does in his home is his business... As a matter of policy, we do not interfere with private family matters, hamshera" (238). The law amended by Taliban undermined the identity of women. They highlight that the women are the husband's property. It is their business. Women are isolated and alienated. There are no one to speak in favour of them.

Miserable plight of female characters show how religious belief and Islamic law practices cripple them and make them powerless. The Taliban family law of "Shira" gives Rasheed an opportunity to subjugate his wives and to exercise his control over them. When the Taliban takes over the country burqa becomes symbol of imprisonment. They made an announcement saying, "Attention women: You will stay inside homes all times. It is not proper for woman to wander aimlessly about the streets ... You will not, under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover with

burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be beaten (278). Even the Taliban laws are in the favour of the male dominating women. The women are persecuted in the name of law. Their freedom is snatched away. They are dominated because the law and rules that are existed in the world is the result of the male dominated society. Similarly, under the name of religion, women are prohibited from going to school and are not allowed to work. “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 well. Obey. Allah-u-Akbar” (249). The religious word has hegemonized women to accept what it is. If they abide to do so, they will not be spared by the god as well. So in the fear of God, they easily agree to be so. They feel that these rules are formed for their own betterment which can be made clear that they are hegemonically suppressed.

Women in Afghan culture have less importance and value in the society. They preferred sons in compare to daughters. Aziza; Laila’s daughter in the novel has been disliked by his father Rasheed only because she is female. It can be highlighted from the dialogue between Rasheed and Laila on Aziza’s topic. Laila in the novel mentions, “Look! She’s reaching for the rattle. How clever she is” (253). In response of this, he says, “I’ll call the newspaper” (253). The dominating attitude of Rasheed can clearly be examined from his satiric tone of the language. The way he delivers his language shows that he is not happy or influenced by the childish activities of Aziza.

But in contrast to the situation he is happier for the baby to come. When Mariam conceives for the first time, he shows his wants and desire for the baby son. He reflects his happiness when Mariam goes with Rasheed to his shoe maker’s shop, “He feels her belly, not through the shirt but under it ... swelling so quickly, Rasheed says, “It’s going to be a big boy. My son will be a Pahlwan! (247). He always desires

for the male child. Birth of a male child is no less than a blessing for Afghan families. They believe that males are the one who will run the family generation.

The idea on Dominant Culture has been influenced by the tendency to 'Cultural Populism' by Jim McGuain in *The Practice Of Cultural Studies*. Dominance here refers to "the way in which the power works. It is however a set of relationships that are everywhere in cultural transactions, cutting across the social divides, hinging together cultural spaces" (143). The set of relationship here refers to the relationship between ideas and everyday living, the ideas or the relationship between rulers or ruled. Similarly being based on this statement, the research highlights the Afghan women as a ruled with the relationship to the ruler Afghan men. It is because of the Afghan Culture which is in the grip of male's hand.

Stereotyping is what Foucault called a 'power/knowledge' sort of game. Michael Foucault in 'Discourse and Power' states "one of the primary concerns of the relationship between knowledge and power and how the relationship operates within discourses and discursive formations and cultural representation of 'US' and 'Them' (142). It clarifies that the power creates subjectivity. These sorts of inequalities in power can easily be found in the text. Power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group. In the novel, we examine that the women are subordinate or excluded group. They are nothing without men. This sort of power upon male has created the notion that they alone in the world cannot survive their life. In the novel, we find out the situation where the women have been presented as a powerless being. It goes like this:

There is another options, he said, scratching the sole of one foot with the calloused heel of the other. She can leave ... I suspect she won't get far. No food, no water, not a rupiah in her pockets, bullets and



rockets flying everywhere. How many days do you suppose she'll last before she's abducted, raped, or tossed into some roadside ditch with her throat slit? Or all three? ... These days, times being what they are, a woman needs a husband ... The way I see it, I deserve a medal. (209-210)

These lines show that it is men's responsibility to protect women's life. The world out there is so dangerous that the women without husband cannot even survive. If they want to survive alone in this world, there is no other choice doing brothel business. This idea clarifies from the perspective Rasheed put in front of Laila. He mentions, "No matter. The point is, I am your husband now, and it falls on me to guard not only your honor but ours, yes, our nang and namoos. That is the husband's burden" (217).

Women in the novel are treated as an object where Rasheed mentions, "If she were a car, she would be a Volga" (216). In the same way, she was again compare with "Benz, a brand new, first class, shiny Benz" (216). Mariam's feelings are not respected rather it is taken as a matter of fun. She is disgraced in the society as she is unable to give a baby to her husband. At the same time, she herself blames for her miscarriage. She says:

Treacherous daughters did not deserve to be mothers, and this was just her punishment ... No. Not Rasheed. She was to blame. She became furious with herself for sleeping in the wrong position, for eating meals that were too spicy, for not eating enough fruit, for drinking too much tea. It was God's fault, for taunting her as He had. For not granting her what He had granted so many other women. (92)

These lines mentioned above portray that women present themselves as a weak character. From the beginning of their birth, they have been taught to behave

emotionally. They were told to treat their husband as a resemblance of the God. They should have the capacity of tolerating the things. They believe that they should not go against will and desire of the men as they are the protector of the women. They do not have guts to unveil the crime committed by the men.

To sum up, this research paper has sought the plight of the women in the Male Dominated society. Mariam, the protagonist of the novel suffers a lot in the Afghan dominant culture. Mariam from her childhood to the whole life ahead could not spend her life blissfully. In her childhood she has been out casted from the love and support of his father whereas in her married life, she has been treated as a machine whose duty is to make her husband happy with delicious food. In her whole life, she suffers because of the male characters Jalil and Rasheed. Similarly, the character Laila in the novel also suffers in the male dominated society. The submissive nature of these two characters hardly go against the prevalent culture of Afghanistan. They show their consent though the culture is completely against them. The brutalities shown by the male members in the Afghan society has led the women to become Feminist. Mariam's action of killing Rasheed, her husband at the end of the story signifies her revolution upon the brutality of the male. Thus showing the plight of the two major Afghan women characters in the novel, the author has shown the women's pathetic position in Afghan society. By showing the miserable condition of the suffered women in the text, the author has criticized the existing patriarchal dominant culture in Afghan society.

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