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## Reframing Gender and Power in Postcolonial Afghanistan: A Feminist Reading of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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### Abstract

Khaled Hosseini's debut novel *The Kite Runner* is the first major fictional representation of life in Afghanistan. The novel attracted global attention for the same reason as it portrayed the social life of the Afghan people, very little known to the English-speaking world, except for the western media portrayal of war, opium, and drugs in the country. Life of women in Afghanistan is the least known outside the country except, once again, as media portrayal of them as extremely suppressed. *The Kite Runner* presents a glimpse of Afghan women's life. This paper is a study of *The Kite Runner* examining how gender, class, and national identity intersect in the depiction of women in the novel. The novel has been analyzed employing Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial feminist critique (1984/88) of the "Third World woman" as a monolithic construct. The objective of analysis was to illustrate the conspicuously silenced narratives of women in the novel and to challenge the patriarchal paradigms reinforced, but also occasionally disrupted, throughout the text. The analysis reveals that the narrative has been complicit in marginalizing female agency in the Afghan society, only occasionally gesturing toward subversive potentials. Mohanty's ideas have been helpful to critique and assess the novel's treatment of prominent female characters, such as Soraya, Sanaubar, and Farzana.

**Keywords:** *The Kite Runner*; Postcolonial Feminism; Gender; Women's agency; Afghan women's representation.

إعادة صياغة النوع الاجتماعي والسلطة في أفغانستان ما بعد الاستعمار: قراءة نسوية لرواية

عداء الطائرة الورقية لخالد حسيني

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خلاصة:

رواية "عداء الطائرة الورقية" لخالد حسيني هي أول تصوير خيالي للحياة في أفغانستان. جذبت الرواية اهتماماً عالمياً وذلك لتصويرها للحياة الاجتماعية للشعب الأفغاني، وهو أمر غير معروف كثيراً في العالم الناطق باللغة الإنجليزية، باستثناء تصوير وسائل الإعلام الغربية للحرب والأفيون والمخدرات في البلاد. إن حياة المرأة في أفغانستان هي الأقل شهرة خارج البلاد باستثناء تصوير وسائل الإعلام لها على أنها مكبوتة للغة. تقدم رواية "عداء الطائرة الورقية" لمحة عن حياة المرأة الأفغانية. هذا البحث هو دراسة لرواية "عداء الطائرة الورقية" ويبحث في كيفية تقاطع النوع الاجتماعي والطبقة والهوية الوطنية في تصوير المرأة في الرواية. تم تحليل الرواية باستخدام النقد النسوي ما بعد الاستعماري لتشاندر موهانتي (١٩٨٤/١٩٨٨) لـ "امرأة العالم الثالث" كبنية متجانسة. كان الهدف من التحليل توضيح السرديات الصامتة عن النساء في الرواية، وتحدي النماذج الأبوية في النص. يكشف التحليل أن السرد كان متواطئاً في تهميش دور المرأة في المجتمع الأفغاني، ولم يُشر إلا نادراً إلى إمكاناتها. وقد ساهمت أفكار موهانتي في نقد تصوير الرواية لشخصيات نسائية مهمة، مثل ثريا، وسنوبر، وفرزانه. الكلمات المفتاحية: عداء الطائرة الورقية؛ النسوية ما بعد الاستعمارية؛ النوع الاجتماعي؛ قوة المرأة؛ تصوير المرأة الأفغانية.

### Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* has garnered global attention for its intimate portrayal of Afghan society, drawing realistic portraits of young men and women in Afghanistan. It is the first novel in English by an Afghan author, and the first fictional work that relates the turbulent history of Afghanistan from the last days of monarchy in Afghanistan, the fall of Soviet influence and the rise of Taliban. The popularity of the novel in the English-speaking world also rests upon the fact that it portrayed the social life of the Afghan people of which very little was known in the English-speaking world, except for the western (most often biased) media portrayal of the war-ravaged, opium-dominated, and drugs-dealing country, backward in all other civil aspects (Mahmood, 2013). The narrative in *The Kite Runner* is a personal journey of its protagonist, Amir. Women play only a minor role in the novel. Life of women in Afghanistan is the least known to the outside world except, once again, in media portrayal of them as extremely suppressed, silenced, and education-denied entities (Hatef & Luqiu, 2020; Mitra, 2019). The story in *The Kite Runner* also seems to endorse the media representation of women in Afghanistan. However, the male-dominated narrative focus of Khaled Hosseini has prompted feminist scholars to examine the invisibilization of women within his fiction (Adnan et al., 2022; Ghimire, 2023), with particular attention to the female characters drawn in *The Kite Runner*. The novel subtly reflects the plight of women under patriarchal and socio-political violence. It also simultaneously marginalizes their subjectivities, reducing them to mere nonentities. These are significant aspects of the portrayal of women in the novel that make it a fertile ground for a feminist critique, especially to be studied from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes* (1984) provides a crucial postcolonial feminist analytical framework that critiques the homogenization of Third World women and foregrounds the significance of historical and cultural specificity. Therefore, the present paper argues that while Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is celebrated for its poignant exploration of guilt, redemption, and the personal cost of socio-political upheaval, the narrative focus of the author has been on male experiences. This narrative marginalization leads to an erasure of women's agency and voice in the novel. Mohanty's seminal essay *Under Western Eyes* (1984) critiques the treatment of women from the Global South as a monolith and urges a grounded, historically contextual approach to feminist scholarship. Applying Mohanty's critique, this paper explores how *The Kite Runner* reproduces and resists patriarchal discourses through selective characterization and narrative silences.

### Literature Review

Since *The Kite Runner* has garnered global attention, there has come up a good amount of academic literature on the novel investigating it from various perspectives. In the sub-sections below is presented a brief review of research literature on the novel along with a description of postcolonial feminist theory used as a critical lens to analyze the selected fiction.

### Postcolonial Feminism: The Third World Woman

Western feminism tends to universalize the female experience globally while the situation of women in former colonies is specific to them and shapes their experience differently from, say women in the predominantly colonizing nations. As the postcolonial thought emerged, the hegemonic conditions caused by Western feminists generated discomfort among feminist scholars from the third world (Ballestrin, 2022). This gave rise to postcolonial feminism which stands at the intersection of postcolonial theory and feminist thought, challenging the universalizing tendencies of Western feminism (Al-Wazedi, 2020; Strazzeri, 2024). The idea was to foreground the diverse and situation-specific experiences of women in formerly colonized societies. The theoretical foundations and key critiques of the movement prepared the base for further research to reclaim agency for marginalized women, critiques imperialist legacies, and foster transnational solidarity among the activists (Lewis & Mills, 2003; Parashar, 2016). The literary critical movement draws from diverse intellectual traditions, such as poststructuralism, postmodernism, Marxist literary theory, and subaltern studies. The writings of scholars, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and bell hooks have largely influenced the movement. They interrogate the intersections of race, gender, class, and empire. For example, Mohanty's critique of the Western feminist practices questions their assumptions of women from the Global South as a homogenous, oppressed group and insists on the specificity of their situation since, to Mohanty, race, colonialism, and class interact with the notion of gender (Rather, 2023). Spivak (1988) questions whether marginalized women can truly be heard within dominant (Western) discourses. Spivak argues that Western [feminist] intellectuals often speak for, rather than with, subaltern women. And bell hooks (1984) places strong emphasis on the significance of 'intersectionality,' even before the term gained popularity in the mainstream academic discourse. Her argument is that race and class are inseparable from gender in understanding women's oppression. Therefore, feminist analysis must resist universalizing narratives and unravel the complexities of women's experiences in diverse global contexts, such as that of women

from Afghanistan. Mohanty's critique is especially powerful in examining literary texts where non-Western women are instrumentalized either as victims or as symbols of national honor (Mohanty, 1984: 64-66). Classism, ethnic tension, and gendered silencing dominate the lives of women in *The Kite Runner*, and therefore, the female characters in the novel need a reading different from what women from a Western background may do.

Postcolonial feminists argue that Western feminism often universalizes the experiences of white, middle-class women, marginalizing the voices of women from colonized or formerly colonized regions. This critique is particularly evident in the way Western feminists have historically portrayed non-Western women as passive victims in need of saving (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Jaleel, 2018). For example, the discourse surrounding the "liberation" of Afghan women during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 exemplifies how feminist rhetoric can be co-opted to justify imperialist agendas (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Postcolonial feminists call for a more nuanced understanding that respects local agency and resists neocolonial narratives. Postcolonial feminism is inherently intersectional, recognizing that gender oppression is shaped by colonial histories, economic exploitation, and cultural specificities. It aligns with transnational feminism in advocating for solidarity across borders without erasing difference (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Rather than imposing a singular feminist agenda, postcolonial feminists advocate for coalition-building that respects diverse struggles. This approach fosters mutual learning and resists the replication of colonial hierarchies within feminist movements. In the age of globalization, postcolonial feminism remains vital. Issues such as migration, climate justice, and labor exploitation disproportionately affect women in the Global South. Postcolonial feminist frameworks help illuminate how these issues are rooted in colonial legacies and global power imbalances (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Digital activism, literature, and art have become powerful tools for postcolonial feminist expression. Writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Roxane Gay, Doris Lessing, Alice Walker, and Arundhati Roy use narrative to challenge dominant paradigms and amplify marginalized voices.

#### ***The Kite Runner*: Research**

*The Kite Runner* has been a subject of research for various thematic, socio-economic, and cultural concerns in the lives of Afghan men and women depicted in the novel. The study of cultural relativism and otherness of Muslim [women] represented in literature, for example, is reported to be a major area of investigation (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ayotte & Husain, 2005; Bhattacharyya, 2018; Chitra, 2013; Hatef & Luqiu, 2020; Mitra, 2019; Rostami-Povey, 2007). Researchers find that the three women characters in the novel, viz., Sanaubar, Soraya, and Farzana, are portrayed as in need of saving since they are the products of a culture that needs colonial intervention (Ghimire, 2023; Rahimi, 2015). Female submissiveness, as studied by several researchers, too is part of a similar project in *The Kite Runner* (Adnan et al, 2022; Ghimire, 2023; Rahimi, 2015; Ramphiphatthamrong, 2019) since the cultural background of the women in question is portrayed as relatively backward and oppressive to women, and therefore, in need of colonial help. The novel has also been explored for the portrayal of male dominance and misogyny (Karthic & Immanuel, 2018; Luan et al., 2025; Naveed, 2024; Noorbakhsh, 2013). The minimal role of women in the novel, amounting to almost neglect of women and marginalization for insignificant agency, is ascribed to male dominance in the society. Ghimire (2023) notes that even educated women like Soraya are portrayed as "voiceless and invisible in their own society" (281). The portrayal mirrors the conditions prevailing at the intersection of gender, class, and postcolonial power studied by several researchers (Ghimire, 2023; Rahimi, 2015; Luan et al., 2025; Naveed, 2024; Noorbakhsh, 2013). Class and ethnicity compound gendered silencing (Mohanty, 1984: 75; Ghimire, 2023: 282). Gendered silencing is conspicuous in the erasure of Hazara women like Farzana, though her husband, Hassan, is assigned a significant role and holds some agency in the narrative. Double standards inherent in the society allow men and women to be treated differently. The character of Soraya, for instance, is judged more harshly for her [sullied] past than that of Amir for his betrayals. The situation reflects the gendered double standards critics like CT Mohanty identify as rooted in patriarchal nationalism (Mohanty, 1988). However, a few researchers have noted a shift in gender roles in *The Kite Runner* (Afandi, 2018; Kapoor & Dhodi, 2021). Women are depicted to have made their decisions now and then, and even deciding to abandon their companions and choices, if need be. A few researchers note that women, as depicted in *The Kite Runner*, face severe dilemmas about their life choices and are afraid of trials because of exclusion, inherent social inequality, violence and discrimination against them, and their negative perception in the society (Hosseini, 2003; Hussein & Ali, 2023). Women are forced to fulfil the duties as expected of them. Hosseini (2003), for example, observes that Sanaubar's potential redemption is contingent upon her return to maternal duty, thus pinpointing that women's value in the male-dominated society is tied to them being caregiving. The novel has also been explored for a closer scrutiny of male psychological response when dealing with traumatic events, regret at a later stage in life followed by self-actualization, and

redemption (Aruta et al., 2022; Du, 2017; Eyisi & John, 2025; Goyal, 2023; Kanosh, 2023; Seethalakshmi & Senthamarai, 2022; Schauer & Elbert, 2015). The narrative shows that childhood trauma may cause an overwhelming emotion in grown-ups resulting in adopting the flight mode, avoiding the required fight to face the real world, causing debilitating inability to act for the fear of plunging into unwanted consequences of choosing to fight. The other notable research area identified by researchers is the biased representation of communities in *The Kite Runner*. Waziri et al. (2023), for instance, note that the representation of the Pashtun community as discriminatory, brutal, uncultured, uncouth, and prejudiced against others is flawed. Equally flawed is the representation of the Hazara community as weak, impoverished, victimized, inferior, and target of Pashtun cruelty. The researchers note that the novel is not a factual representation of the real society of Afghanistan, although some characteristics and cultural features of the country described in the novel are accurate. The Kite Runner has been studied from a Marxist Perspective as well (Putz, 2023; Tharu, 2024). The researchers' findings are that the narrative in the novel represents a struggle for economic resources and puts forward the economic issues faced by common man in Afghanistan. Some of the research studies on *The Kite Runner*, particularly the studies using postcolonial feminist theory as a frame of reference, have also taken into consideration Khaled Hosseini's other fictional works also into consideration, such as *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* (Rafiq-uz-Zaman et al., 2025; Sullivan, 2008; Shabanirad & Seifi, 2015) since those works also yield to a postcolonial feminist reading of the narratives. However, as noted in the review of literature above, although *The Kite Runner* has been investigated for the issues pertaining to gender and power in the Afghan society as portrayed in the novel, yet the existing studies have not looked at the narrative in *The Kite Runner* from CT Mohanty's (1984) postcolonial feminist perspective to critique the homogenization of the third world women by Western feminist scholars, and therefore, there exists a gap in literature that needs further research, with special reference to women in Afghanistan portrayed in the novel.

### Discussion

The plot, storyline, and character delineation in *The Kite Runner* aptly exemplify CT Mohanty' (1984) critique of the homogenization of "Third World women" (Ashrafuzzaman, 2025; El Ouardi & Sandy, 2019) since, though all the women characters in the novel come from the same place, pertaining to their socio-economic status, they fall into different categories, with differing objectives in life for which they seek freedom from patriarchal norms. There are four major women characters – Sanaubar, Soraya, Farzana, and Jamila – who play important roles in the life of the protagonist, Amir, and leave an impression on his personality. Sanaubar and Farzana are Hazara women. Hazaras are an ethnic minority in Afghanistan, and as portrayed in the novel, they have been historically persecuted and oppressed by the dominant majority Pashtuns. In his young days, Rahim Khan's love for a Hazara woman, Homaira, was cut short by his family because servants and masters are never equal: "You don't order someone to polish your shoes one day and call them 'sister' the next" (Hosseini, 84). She was not accepted by his Pashtun family; Rahim Khan's elder brother, Jalal, even went to fetch his hunting rifle. Although Waziri et al. (2023) object to the given representation of Pashtuns as the oppressors, aggressors, discriminatory, and brutal and Hazaras as the victims of their cruelty, yet some events in the fictional narrative do testify to their historical accuracy in then Afghanistan, which support the representation. The fictional sterility and physical deformity of Ali, the Hazara, mirror the helplessness of his community, while the rape of his son, Hasssan, by Assef, a Pashtun, and Hassan's inability to even report the incident to his father, is symptomatic of the dominance of the Pashtun community. It's a pity that Ali, an elderly man, is ridiculed for his deformity by a mere child, the same Assef. Under the given circumstances, it is understandable that Hazara women are doubly oppressed. They face patriarchal oppression at home for being women; and oppressed by the dominant Pashtuns for being Hazara. Thus, the social standing of Sanaubar and Farzana cannot be compared to the social standing of Soraya and Jamila, though all four are women and outwardly all four are victims of patriarchal oppression. Sanaubar, for instance, is a desirable woman to one and all as she, "had a dimpled smile and a walk that drove men crazy. No one who passed her on the street, be it a man or a woman, could look at her only once" (Hosseini, 180). I argue that this could happen because she was a Hazara woman, who was visualized as "available" because of her low social rank. A Pashtun woman, on the other hand, wouldn't be treated in the same manner, however beautiful and enticing she might have been. The soldier's remarks about her person, who makes fun of Hassan recalling his sexual encounter with his mother, makes it even clearer. Amir's mother was also beautiful, but none had the guts to make comments on her person as they did to Sanaubar. And, as it appears, Baba may have also taken advantage of his high social rank to entice Sanaubar to his bed. Thus, the silencing of Hazara women in *The Kite Runner* takes place for reasons so different from the reasons Pashtun women like Soraya and Jamila are silenced for. The Western feminists club all women from the Third



Word together as uncivilized and illiterate 'other' who are victims, and therefore, need the intervention of the advanced, educated Western women to save them from patriarchal oppression (Ashrafuzzaman, 2025; El Ouardi & Sandy, 2019; Jaleel, 2018). The events in *The Kite Runner* prove them wrong, though. Sofia Akrami, Baba's deceased wife and Amir's mother, was a highly educated woman (and that was way back in early nineteen sixties) who loved to read literature and indulge in high quality artwork. Soraya is an educated Afghan girl living in the US who decides to pursue teaching as her career because that gives her a sense of fulfilment. It is not mentioned whether Jamila Taheri, Soraya's mother, is formally educated or not, but her social standing shows she must have been since her husband was an army general. Though Sanaubar and Farzana are illiterate women, their illiteracy cannot be a pretext for their marginalization and control. The "rescue mission" discourse ingrained in Western or West-oriented narrative which portrays Third World women as passive, voiceless and marginalized while the Western women portrayed as advanced, enlightened and entitled, is unacceptable to women like Sanaubar and Farzana, though they pay a heavy price for their strong belief in themselves. The dominant community that rules on discrimination and control poses a threat to their lives. Postcolonial feminism takes into consideration the diversity of experiences of rural and urban women in the Third World as they make efforts to understand their specific situations. As, for example, to understand the differing empowerment needs of the four major women characters in *The Kite Runner*, it is important to understand what is of paramount importance to each woman in question depending upon her experiences based on her upbringing, habitat, social status, and cultural practices. Farzana, who is from a rural background, for instance, needs freedom in social terms because she is marginalized for her social standing, not because she is marginalized as a woman at home. She doesn't need a savior to rescue herself from patriarchal oppression since her husband is not a patriarch and does not oppress her. Soraya, on the other hand, fights for equal treatment with men from the Afghan society in the US; her husband is also a gentle man who respects gender equality. So, patriarchy also exists in varied forms and degrees and cannot be reduced to just one homogenous category as is done in Western feminist discourse. Farzana and Soraya, and the other two women as well, are not totally devoid of agency and activism and they are already fighting for their rights in their culturally and locationally specific ways. Their empowerment goals may not coincide with the goals of Western feminists, such as sexual liberation, gender equality, and reproductive rights, while on the other hand, their priorities, as represented in the novel, are issues like combating poverty, fighting dominant forces within their societies, and access to education.

### Double Standards

Postcolonial feminism critiques double standards prevalent in postcolonial countries. I will cite two instances of patriarchal double standards from the novel. In old age, Sanaubar returns to her son, Hassan, after her rendezvous and ultimate frustration [her face is disfigured with slash marks of a knife] with the wandering singer. Now she turns into a woman the Afghans accepted as a good woman. In Amir's eyes too she has been a sinner. On the other hand, despite knowing that Hassan was Baba's biological son, and that way Baba had also used Sanaubar, Amir doesn't disown Baba as a fallen sinner as he does Sanaubar. Sanaubar suffered for her sins, whereas Baba led a peaceful, good life. This is patriarchal double standard as exemplified in the lines on Soraya not getting any suitor for long: "Afghan men, especially those from reputable families, were fickle creatures. A whisper here, an insinuation there, and they fled like startled birds" (Hosseini, 124). The second instance is from Soraya's life. Soraya narrates to Amir the story of her past and relates how people of her community made taunt on her character. She is angry that, "Their sons go out to nightclubs looking for meat and get their girlfriends pregnant, they have kids out of wedlock, and no one says a goddamn thing. Oh, they're just men having fun! I make one mistake and suddenly everyone is talking *nang* and *namoos*, and I have to have my face rubbed in it for the rest of my life" (Hosseini, 179). The treatment of Soraya's past illustrates the double standard Mohanty (1984) critiques. The situation reflects what Mohanty calls the "Third World difference," where women's identities are reduced to moral archetypes (Mohanty, 72). The identity of Farzana, Hassan's wife, is also reduced to mere moral archetype. She was not remembered as a brave woman shot by the Taliban for attacking them but for being courteous, soft-spoken, modest ["she spoke in a voice barely higher than a whisper and she would not raise her pretty, hazel eyes to meet my gaze," says Rahim Khan (Hosseini, 176)], and very faithful to her husband: "... the way she was looking at Hassan, he might as well have been sitting on the throne at the Arg" (Hossieni, 176).

### Gendered/Ethnic Silencing and Patriarchal Control

Hosseini depicts women's honor in *The Kite Runner* as symbolic of familial and national pride. This patriarchal nationalism is visible not only during monarchy days in Afghanistan but also under the Islamic Republic and after the rise of the Taliban. The Taliban's rise led to stricter patriarchal control on women in the form of forced veiling, reduced mobility, restricted access to education, and moral obligations. The Taliban used these restrictions not just

as religious or moral acts but as a political tool of masculine dominance. Hosseini provides a good description of Taliban-era Afghanistan where women faced unspeakable horrors as described by Rahim Khan. Afghanistan became a regime where control over women became symbolic of national strength. However, examined from the postcolonial perspective exemplified by Mohanty (1984), the stories of rape, public stonings, and confinement appear in male narration, most of the time related by Rahim Khan, not explored through the women themselves. In the words of Mohanty, this narrative technique is continuation and perpetuation of the tradition of “speaking for” rather than “speaking with” Third World women (Mohanty, 75). The point is that the absence of direct female testimony weakens the novel’s potential feminist subversion since, despite being peripheral in the plot, women in *The Kite Runner* exist as narrative catalysts or ideological symbols rather than autonomous characters. Hosseini stops short of giving women narrative agency in *The Kite Runner*. For instance, in the story of Sanaubar, initially depicted through the lens of moral judgment and later as her eventual return for her final redemption, Sanaubar does not have the agency to relate the depth of her motivations, which remain largely unexplored. Sanaubar’s depiction as a fallen woman redeemed is narrated from a male narrator’s perspective, as Rahim Kahan says, “She walked past me and kissed Hassan on the cheek... she had come back” (Hosseini, 210). Above all, following Mohanty (1984), Sanaubar’s redemption is also anchored in caregiving, a narrative resolution that appears to be “liberatory” but in fact that re-inscribes traditional roles for women (Mohanty, 71) and reinforces the patriarchal trope that women attain value through domestic labor. Farzana, Hassan’s wife, on the other hand, represents ethnic silencing. She is an invisible subaltern rendered a mere narrative footnote. She appears only in Rahim Khan’s narrativization in passive constructions, without direct speech or articulation of interior depth of a character. Her erasure signals a class-based silencing observed as “intersectionality” between gender and economic marginalization in postcolonial feminist discourse. Ghimire (2023) also observes that in *The Kite Runner* Hazara women are “voiceless and invisible in their own society” (p. 281). Postcolonial feminist critics, like Mohanty (1984) see such class-ethnic silencing as women’s oppression as a consequence of being a woman “rather than of the interdependence of gender and material realities” (Mohanty, 74). Farzana’s textual omission is symptomatic of a structural exclusion hinged upon both gender and ethnic identity. The struggle of Third World women cannot be separated from the intersections of class and race oppressions. Hazara women characters in the novel are relegated to the margins of both the main narrative and the mainstream society. The social hierarchy between Pashtuns and Hazaras mirrors complex interplay of ethnicity and class. The resultant situation compounds the invisibility of Hazara women like Sanaubar and Farzana (Noorbakhsh, 2013).

### **The Possibility of a Subversive Feminist Reading**

A postcolonial feminist reading of *The Kite Runner* yields a reevaluation of the novel as a narrative text in which narrative absences function as critical discursive strategies. Women are either conspicuously invisible in this fictional work or appear on the margins. That appears to be a deliberate political choice made by the author, which tantamount to falling prey to a globalized literary tendency [in fiction especially] to foreground only masculine trauma. It is essential to acknowledging such silences for a more nuanced interpretive practice, and it is also required to accommodate the unarticulated and marginalized experiences of women like Sanaubar and Farzana, within patriarchal contexts. Although *The Kite Runner* is reticent about female subjectivity, it generates interpretive spaces wherein female resistance may be discerned. For example, the normalization of patriarchal ideologies inherent in the narrative may be interrogated by investigating the absence of female voices and the narrative elisions surrounding gender. *The Kite Runner* does not have a full-fledged feminist vision, but using the postcolonial feminist critical lens the limitation can be transformed into an opportunity to carry out scholarly inquiry, rather than signaling conceptual resignation. The complete absence of Amir’s mother, for instance, is a metaphor for the systemic suppression of women’s voices. This figurative erasure, nonetheless, draws critical attention on the socio-cultural mechanisms at work in the literary field through which certain narratives are privileged since the erasure is not accidental but a sign of the working of a society where women are central in a family, and still denied agency (Rahimi, 2015). *The Kite Runner* is critically acclaimed for its exploration of father-son relationship, guilt, and redemption in Afghan society, but the novel offers only a male-centered view, thus prompting considerable scholarly debate on its portrayal of female characters. Female characters function in the novel as ethical anchors and conduits of cultural continuity but appear on the margin of the storyline. It is only the male protagonist, Amir, who mediates the unfolding events, and blocks access to the interior lives of female characters. In fact, this structural organization reflects the actual sociopolitical reality of Afghanistan, where women have historically been relegated to domestic and private spheres and subjected to extreme patriarchal control (Rostami-Povey, 2007). However, as Noorbakhsh (2013) argues, Sanaubar’s return symbolizes women’s capacity to reclaim their agency within a hostile

cultural system. In the given scenario, Soraya Taheri may be considered as the most rounded female character in the novel. She offers a subtle critique of patriarchal double standards and women's resistance to them. Soraya also offers a challenge to the male characters in the novel displaying enough moral courage (Sullivan, 2008).

### Conclusion: Power in the Margins

To sum up, *The Kite Runner* offers subtle gestures toward the sufferings of women characters, but the narrative does not provide any woman with narrative agency or portrayal complexity. The present paper has employed postcolonial feminist critical lens, especially CT Mohanty's critical insights, to investigate the novel's depictions of gender. The critical theory has proved effective in examining the portrayals as culturally and politically inflected constructs that deserve even further, deeper interrogation. Mohanty's critique of Western feminist scholars' "colonial gaze" has also been helpful in grasping the significance of what stories are told, and what stories are deemed silent, and why. A close reading of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* offered a poignant exploration of the male protagonist's guilt, redemption, and belonging, and at the same time, displayed how female perspectives are sidelined. Postcolonial feminist framework enabled the researcher to critically unfold these gendered biases. The paper also offers an analytical challenge to readers to think about whose stories are told, whose are silenced, and how socio-political power operates - not only in concrete societal contexts but also in the narratives we choose to tell. The analysis also shows that though women are not the central characters in *The Kite Runner*, they are not at all irrelevant. Their roles are subtle, and they are central to the themes of love, resilience, loss, and healing for the male protagonist and other male characters occupying the center stage. They are marginalized in the narrative for a reason, reflecting the gendered realities of Afghan society, but that limitation can be turned into an opportunity.

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