

Sisterhood as a Saviour of Afghan Women: An Analysis of Khaled Hosseini's Ideology

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Abstract

Sisterhood corresponds to a bond of love, cooperation and solidarity among women to fight against their individual or collective oppression at the hands of patriarchy. It initiates and shapes the struggle of women against their sexism. On the other hand, envy and non-cooperation act as enemies of women, making them as easy prey for the patriarchal forces. This study provides a textual analysis of Afghan American novelist Khaled Hosseini's novels *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. The theoretical foundations of the research are laid down on the theories proposed by bell hooks. The study shows that the solidarity of female characters in the novels freed them from the oppression of patriarchy. However, their envy and non-cooperation led them to the domination of men. This study is a unique addition to the topic as it brings together the ideals of sisterhood and envy on the selected novels of Khaled Hosseini.

Keywords: Afghan women, bell hooks, envy, Khaled Hosseini, oppression, patriarchy, sisterhood

1. Introduction

The term sisterhood literally relates to the kinship between biological sisters. However, feminists of First Wave introduced this term to represent a feeling of affection, friendship and cooperation among women to find a solution to personal, political or gender issues. This relationship can be found at an individual level, in a group or women around the world (Vivienne, 2016). The women rights movement worked as a consciousness awakening phenomenon for the common women, and they were able to understand that a joint and united struggle against their subjugation can be the only way for their liberation. The feminist scholars of the First Wave feminism believed that a powerful sisterhood could be created only through changing the female thinking about the sexist oppression. This change can then lead to political solidarity among women which can prove a precursor to overthrow the patriarchy. Hence, Sebastian (2016) identifies sisterhood as a bond of solidarity among women who are not biologically related. Sisterhood encourages women to support other women, appreciate their achievements, and participate in the struggle to end sexism. Moreover, Hooks (2000) believes that women's solidarity is a source to enhance struggle against gender inequality and the idea to abandon sisterhood will inevitably weaken the women's struggle against sexism. Therefore, sisterhood is a powerful tool to fight against personal, political and gender oppression of women. On the other hand, envy and non-cooperation of women for their fellow women is a significant hindrance in achieving their individual and collective goals. Hooks (1984) argues that feeling of superiority or negative competition damages the relationship of friendship and cooperation among women. As a result, women themselves help patriarchy to keep them powerless and oppressed. Moreover, Wollstonecraft (1992) also identifies envy among women as a source of their individual and collective downfall in society. Hence, this study uses the feminist variant of the terms sisterhood and envy to analyse the selected novels of Khaled Hosseini.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American novelist, has narrated various incidents of women cooperation which ultimately proved a solution to their oppression at the individual or state level. In contrast, there are

instances of non-cooperation as well, which surely increased their miseries. This paper attempts to analyse all these instances of cooperation and non-cooperation, under the theoretical lens of sisterhood, to prove that women's solidarity has always worked as their saviour from miseries and their non-cooperation has led them to more hardships.

Hosseini is a celebrated novelist in modern English literature. He opened a window for English readers to see and understand the unique culture of Afghanistan. Although, Hosseini was criticised for not giving adequate space to female characters in his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. He efficiently addressed this criticism, and his second and third novels are dominated by female characters (Mechanic, 2017). Hosseini opened his eyes in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965. However, he had to take refuge in America due to the Soviet-Afghan war in 1979. Hosseini completed his education in medicine and worked as a physician from 1996–2004 (Stuhr, 2009).

Hosseini published his first novel on kite flying tradition and cruelties of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2003. It was an immediate success, and Hosseini became an overnight celebrity. This novel gave him worldwide recognition, and the novel was translated into many languages. Moreover, human rights organisations invited Hosseini to participate in the welfare of his countrymen. Thus, Hosseini visited his home country after 27 years in 2003, and he himself witnessed the destruction of war and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. This visit gave him the inspiration for his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as he told in his interview with Book Browse:

In the spring of 2003, I went to Kabul, and I recall seeing these burqa-clad women sitting at street corners, with four, five, six children, begging for change. I remember watching them walking in pairs up the street, trailed by their children in ragged clothes, and wondering how life had brought them to that point... I spoke to many of those women in Kabul. Their life stories were truly heart-breaking... When I began writing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over (BookBrowse, 2007, Para 4).

Readers and critics praised *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and it added to the literary prestige of Hosseini. Hosseini then published his third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, in 2013. The story focuses on the painful lives of Afghan immigrants and the influence of poverty on the lives of the Afghan people. Lastly, Hosseini published a short story, *Sea Prayer*, in 2018 to pay homage to the Syrian immigrant child who was found dead on a Turkish seashore in 2015 (Tundelkar, 2016; Mechanic, 2017). Today, Hosseini is a respected name in the world of English literature. His work is being taught at universities all around the world. Besides, he has been honoured because of his charity work for the welfare of refugees. He is working as a goodwill ambassador for UNHCR and his own organisation, *Khaled Hosseini Foundation*, is working to improve health and education facilities in Afghanistan.

This study seeks to reveal how Hosseini has put forth the ideology of sisterhood as a saviour in the lives of Afghan women, and how the women suffer because of their envy and non-cooperation.

1.1 Summaries of the Selected Novels

1.1.1 A Thousand Splendid Suns

Mariam is an illegitimate daughter of a wealthy businessman Jalil and his servant Nana. Jalil and Nana had an affair resulting in the pregnancy of Nana. Jalil Khan is unable to face the pressure of his wives and sends Nana away to live in the suburbs of Herat. One day, Mariam leaves her mother to live with her father but she is not allowed even to enter the house. On her return to the village, she finds that Nana has committed suicide. Resultantly, Jalil and his wives arrange her marriage to an elderly cobbler, Rasheed, and send her to Kabul. Due to a series of miscarriages and inability to give birth to a son, Rasheed starts abusing her physically and verbally.

Laila, a beautiful young girl, lives in the neighbourhood of Mariam in Kabul. Her mother, Fariba, is in constant grief due to the death of her two sons in the Afghan war. One day a rocket hits their house, killing Babi and Fariba and injuring Laila. Rasheed takes Laila to his home and nurses her back to health. Eventually, Rasheed forces Laila to accept his marriage proposal. Rasheed changes her loving attitude for Laila at the birth of a girl, Aziza. However, Aziza becomes the source of conciliation between Laila and Mariam. Laila gets pregnant again and to Rasheed utter happiness, this time she delivers a baby boy, Zalami.

Meanwhile, Rasheed's shop has burned down, and the family have run into debt. Laila has to place Aziza in an orphanage in order to avoid Rasheed, turning her into a beggar. Laila often faces punishment at the hands of the Taliban for walking alone in the streets. Then, one day to her utmost astonishment and happiness, she meets her childhood lover and the real father of Aziza, Tariq, at her gate. Nevertheless, Rasheed comes to know about these meetings and tries strangling Laila. Mariam comes to her aid, and in the scuffle kills Rasheed. Mariam

accepted her crime and was given the death sentence.

Tariq takes Laila and children to Pakistan. They get marry and live in Pakistan for some years. After the US attack on Afghanistan, the situation improves, and they decide to return to their home country. In the end, Laila is pregnant with her third child, and this time they think about male names only because if it is a girl, they have only one name for her, Mariam.

1.1.2 And the Mountains Echoed

Saboor, a labourer, is telling a story to his children Abdullah and Pari about a div (Persian word for demon or genie). Baba Ayub hunts a div for taking his child as a sacrifice. However, he witnesses his son living a luxurious life. Therefore, he returns home. Next day, Saboor visits Kabul with Abdullah and Pari for construction work. However, it becomes evident to Abdullah that his father has sold Pari to a wealthy family called, Wahdatis. Hence, Abdullah decides to leave the village.

Parwana and Masooma are twin sisters. Masooma is exceptionally beautiful, and because of her beauty, she marginalises Parwana throughout their lives. Therefore, Parwana is unable to bear when she knows that they are in love with the same person. Hence, she pushes Masooma from the tree. Resultantly, Masooma gets handicapped and forces Parwana to marry Saboor and abandon her in the desert. In the next chapter, the story shifts towards Masooma and Parwana's brother, Nabi. He works as a cook with Mr Suleiman Wahdati. On Suleiman's illness, Nila leaves him for France with her adopted daughter Pari. Nabi gives this confession letter to Dr Markos, a Greek doctor, and requests him to find Pari and tell her about her brother, Abdullah.

In chapter five, two cousins Idris and Timur return from America to sell their property in Kabul. Idris meets a young girl Roshi, who is severely injured by her uncle in a family dispute. Idris could not fulfil his promise to take her for treatment in America. Still, Roshi becomes a famous writer, and she dedicates her book to Timur and Dr Amra for their help.

Pari is now a grown-up woman living with Nila in France. Nila always feels frustrated because of her broken relationships and Pari. Desperate Nila commits suicide, but in one of her interviews, she tells the interviewer that Pari is not her real daughter. Pari marries Eric and is unable to visit her home country. The story again shifts to Afghanistan and tells the story of a boy Adil, son of an influential person known as Commander Sahib. Adil comes to know about the injustices of his father and forceful marriage with his mother. Hence, he finds it difficult to respect his father. The narrative again shifts, and this time Dr Markos from Greece tells his story. His mother, Odelia, is a courageous lady who helps Madeline and her daughter Thalia to overcome their problems and live normal lives.

In the last part, Abdullah is settled in America with his wife and daughter Pari Abdullah. Pari has dedicated her life to look after her ailing father. Unexpectedly, she receives a call and then meets her aunt Pari, in America. Unfortunately, Abdullah is not able to recognise his sister. After the death of her father, Pari leaves America to live with her aunt in France.

1.2 Recent Studies on Women and Sisterhood in Literary Texts

There is a growing interest in researching woman and sisterhood. Yu (2006) studied the effects of cultural differences on the relation of sisterhood in the novels of Amy Tan and Cristina Garcia. She studied the differences in race and ethnicity, disturbing the relation of sisterhood. The female characters of both novelists managed to overcome these differences and eventually found the solace in sisterhood.

Thomas (2016) studied the patriarchal oppression of female characters in Alice Walker's novel *The Colour Purple*. She discussed that the female character Celie in the novel was able to get rid of her persecution only because of the coalition with other female characters, i.e., Sofia, Nettie and Shug Avery. She concluded that solidarity among women acts as a comforting and liberating force for them.

Rascanu (2016) discussed the theme of sisterhood in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*. She concluded that in addition to patriarchy, women's love relations are also responsible for the distortion of sisterhood in Bangladeshi women. She rightly claimed that patriarchy does not allow women to build a relationship of cooperation as it keeps women under strict social rules. On the other hand, love also enhances the power of patriarchy because of the imbalanced power relations between men and women. This study further extends the relation of sisterhood to envy and non-cooperation between women of a particular society and class.

Ahmad (2019) analysed the role of sisterhood in the novel *Ghumkature Ishwar* written by Bangladeshi writer Salina Hussain. He argues that the female characters in this novel display an excellent show of solidarity without caring about the differences in class and race. He concludes that the novel is a beautiful example of *Sisterhood is*

Powerful as a male character, representative of patriarchy, was abandoned by mother, sister and wife through a combined, courageous show of solidarity. Besides, Chereker (2020) explored the power of sisterhood to bring women together on a common platform to fight for their rights concerning Senegalese women as represented by Mariam Ba in her novel *So Long a Letter*. She identifies that female friendship has healing power. She revealed that the female characters in the novel could fight polygamy, colonialism, racism, and all kinds of prejudices by developing relation of sisterhood among them. The researcher concludes that sisterhood plays a crucial role in women's struggle of liberation in any particular society.

The importance of global sisterhood is studied by Saylor (2019) in the novel *Fatima the Bedouin* written by Afifa Karam. She described through the female characters of the novel that it is vital for women to come together to find a solution to their problems. Therefore, if women want to help each other, no force can hinder their way. She proved this through the depiction of sisterhood between female characters of different origin, religion, language and classes in *Fatima the Bedouin*.

Suryani (2018) critiqued the viewpoint of Chesler that sisterhood is not common in the Arab and Muslim world in the light of Afghan writer Atiq Rahimi's novel, *The Patience Stone*. She acknowledges Tyson's argument that sexism creates sisterhood in women, and the victims of patriarchy always cooperate due to their shared experience of oppression. She showed that sisterhood was created between the heroine and her aunt because of their shared experience of oppression at the hands of male members of their family.

There are some studies conducted on the show of solidarity and the bravery of women in Hosseini's novels. One such study is done by Rabbani and Chaudhury (2018) to dig the resistance of female characters of Selina Hossain and Khaled Hosseini in the face of patriarchal oppression. They argued that the female characters represented in the novels are silenced because of the constant and unjust use of male control. However, this oppression resulted in a bond of solidarity among women, and they ultimately gain some power to fight back for their rights. Sebastian (2016) also applauded Hosseini for giving voice to voiceless Afghan women through his female characters. She argued that female solidarity is a key to overthrow the patriarchal, political and religious subjugation of women in any society. She proved her argument through the character portrayal of Mariam and Laila in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Kilinc (2017) used the model designed by Downing and Roush (1985) to show the feminist identity development in the characters of Mariam and Laila in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The researcher relates the sisterhood formed between Mariam and Laila in relation to the changing political and historical scenario of Afghanistan. The study also highlights the development of critical consciousness in the female characters as it is crucial for the identity development process of women.

Morgan (1996) advocated the need for globalisation of sisterhood as women throughout the world are victims of sexism though it can vary in degree. Ghadery (2019) connects the ideas of Morgan to recent hashtag feminism and #MeToo movement against the sexual harassment of women at workplace. It is important to note that this movement gives voice to voiceless women, and they are intertwined in a relationship of care and solidarity. Ghadery marks this transnational cooperation among women as a sign of the globalisation of sisterhood.

Although there are a few studies published on the solidarity among female characters in Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, however, this study focuses on the theme of sisterhood as a liberator for the female characters not only in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* but also *And the Mountains Echoed*. *Kite Runner* is not selected for this study as it presents a limited role of female characters. Besides, this research analyses non-cooperation and envy as an enemy of female characters in Hosseini's novels. This study is unique and is hoped to provide a good addition to the existing treasure of knowledge.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theory of sisterhood proposed by Bell Hooks in her essays *Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women* (1986) and *Sisterhood is Still Powerful* (2000). Women are the most oppressed group because of sexism, which is infused and inculcated through societal structures and beliefs of patriarchal society. Men always discourage women from developing any kind of cooperation or solidarity among them. They try to teach them that women's bonding is valueless, and it is not beneficial for them. Thus, men encourage women to keep relation only with men and present women as a natural enemy for each other. Hooks (1984) relates these beliefs and ideals to the patriarchal nature of society. Patriarchy, according to Hooks (1986), is a social and political system striving for the superiority of men over women. It allows men to enslave women through unjust and undefined use of power and violence. Hooks (1986) believes that sisterhood is a tool for women against the oppression of men.

Hooks (1986) opines that women are not a uniform group and they are, "divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices" (p. 44). She proposed that women need to accept that their differences

in colour and class but should be united against the common cause of men's hostility toward women (Hooks, 1986). That solidarity in the name of sisterhood can create sexist socialisation to confront the sexist ideas of society. Hooks (2000) views that sisterhood is still powerful, and it will remain powerful forever against the sexist ideals of society.

The present study attempts to analyse the process of formation of sexism through the sexist ideas of the patriarchal society that divides women and the role of sisterhood in creating the solidarity among women which helps in their emancipation in the light of the female characters as described in the two novels under consideration. The study also shows that male characters in the novels used their power and violence to control and subdue female characters. Moreover, the non-cooperation and conflict of female characters proved fatal to them. Therefore, this study tries to prove through the portrayal of female characters in Hosseini's novels that Hooks (1984, 1986, and 2000) was right in her claim about sisterhood, patriarchy and non-cooperation of women.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study, and textual analysis was used to analyse the selected literary texts. The texts were chosen based on purposive sampling in the sense that they provide rich insights into the theme of the sisterhood. In generating data for the study, the common steps in textual analysis process were carried out. Firstly, the two texts were read line by line several times for the purpose of data familiarity. After that, selective reading of the texts was carried out to achieve the objective of the study which is to reveal how Hosseini has put forth the ideology of sisterhood as a saviour in the lives of Afghan women, and how the women are presented to suffer from their envy and non-cooperative behaviour. Then, the relevant extracts of the texts were gathered and discussed among the researchers to be presented as evidence for the interpretations made based on the Hooks' (1986, 2000) perspectives of sisterhood. Finally, a cross-analysis was carried out to reveal the similarities and differences in the portrayal of the ideology of sisterhood in the two texts.

4. Findings and Discussion

Chesler (2005) marks that solidarity and kindness rarely exists among Muslim and Arab women. This study proves her right as the female characters of Hosseini, mostly representing the Afghan Muslim women do not always care much about the interest of each other. In order to prove this viewpoint, this research provides instances of solidarity and non-cooperation among female characters of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. These shreds of evidence are analysed in the light of the proposed theory in the following lines.

4.1 Sisterhood in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

The novel narrates a unique and exemplary show of sisterhood between two female characters who were married to a merciless man, Rasheed. Mariam, an illiterate woman, born through an illegitimate relationship, was the first wife of Rasheed. On the other hand, Laila was a young, beautiful and educated girl but she was forced to become the second wife of Rasheed as her parents were killed in a rocket attack in the wake of the Afghan war. Though the circumstances gathered two women to live under one roof, but they were representative of different class and tribes. Laila belonged to a middle-class family and Mariam, although a daughter of a rich man, inherited the poor class of her mother. Therefore, the barriers of class and race proved a hindrance in the development of solidarity between Mariam and Laila. Although, there were some glimpses of care and cooperation at the initial stage of Laila's marriage with Rasheed. At first, Mariam was not in agreement to this marriage, but Rasheed blackmailed her in the name of the prevailing situation, as shown in the following extract.

She can leave. I won't stand in her way. But I suspect she won't get far. No food, no water, no a rupiah in her pockets, bullets and rockets flying everywhere. How many days do you suppose she'll last before she is abducted, raped, or tossed into some roadside ditch with her throat slit? (p. 192).

Hooks assumption that male ideology considers women valueless unless they are in a bond with men truly depicts the logic of Rasheed. Therefore, Rasheed assumed that the only solution to Laila's miseries is in their marriage. Mariam was also aware that he just cares for his interest and he will not give any weightage to her reservations. Still, Mariam showed agreement and talked to Laila about Rasheed's marriage proposal. In return, Laila also showed her concern about Mariam, and she refused to wear Mariam's ring on her wedding day. However, this feeling of care and cooperation did not last long, and Rasheed was able to sow the seeds of mistrust between them. He called Mariam 'Harami' (bastard) in front of Laila and also symbolised her with an old 'Volga' car. Resultantly, Mariam felt distrusted, and it led to their fight and their relation further deteriorated. Hooks (1986) again proves right in her belief that male ideology presents women as enemies, and they are

discouraged from showing any solidarity for each other.

Luckily for both women, their first fight proved the last as well, and it was made possible again by the care and cooperation of Laila. The life of Mariam was an extended episode of miseries and sufferings. She never found consolation and sympathy from her father, stepmothers and even from her husband. They all treated her as a burden, and it makes her act like a robot, doing whatever she was asked to do. Hence, Rasheed treated her like a punching bag to relieve himself of his financial and domestic problems. He also blamed her for all the troubles in his life. One day, he tried to beat her, claiming that she has corrupted Laila, and now she does not care for her needs. However, Laila did not allow him to punish her and Mariam felt strange to get help from someone, “Nobody’s ever stood up for me before” (p. 223). Laila’s help and Mariam’s regard for this help brought them together. As a result, they sat together, and Mariam warned her of Rasheed’s lousy treatment because of her giving birth to a daughter, as shown in the following extract.

He’ll turn on you too, you know,” Mariam said..... “And you gave him a daughter. So you see, your sin is even less forgivable than mine....., but what do you say we sinners have us a cup of *chai* in the yard? (p. 223)

The use of the words *we sinners* show the shared experience of the two women, and this shared experience proved stronger than their minor differences, and it led them to a strong bond of sisterhood. It also proves that Ahmad (2019) rightly claimed that the differences of race and class could never hinder the real solidarity among women. Mariam also got attracted towards Laila’s daughter, Aziza, when she came to know that she is also an illegitimate child like her. Therefore, they tied themselves through a strong bond of kinship, “And in this fleeting, wordless exchange with Mariam, Laila knew that they were not enemies any longer” (p. 224). Their relation is similar to the strong bond of sisterhood between Anna and Elsa as portrayed in the movie *Frozen* (Azmi, Ab Rashid, & Safawati, 2016).

This sisterhood led them to fight not only against the brutal control of their husband but the state as well. Mohammad Na’aim, Rajamanickam and Nordin (2019) recommend compensation for the victims of domestic violence at the state level. However, Afghanistan of the time was a country ruled by warlords, and a woman’s life did not matter much during that time. Laila decided to take refuge in Pakistan and Mariam agreed to accompany them as she could not think to live without Aziza and Laila. However, they were caught and returned to home by the officials. On their return, Rasheed treated them brutally and warned them for their cooperation, but he failed to put a crack in the kinship of Mariam and Laila.

Laila was losing her hopes when her lover and the real father of Aziza, Tariq, returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan. However, Rasheed spotted their meetings, and he tried to kill Laila. Mariam was unable to bear the misery of Laila and Aziza, and she decided to kill their exploiter. This is shown in the extract below.

He is going to kill her, she thought. He really means to. And Mariam could not, would not, allow that to happen. He’d taken so much from her in twenty-seven years of marriage. She would not watch him take Laila too.... Mariam swung (p. 310).

It is strange to notice that Mariam who never in her life protested or reacted against the brutalities of Rasheed was able to kill Rasheed. Sisterhood gave courage and purpose to Mariam’s life, and it enabled her to not only take her revenge but also protect the people she loved the most. Ahmad (2019) identified the same show of sisterhood when a mother, sister and wife joined hands to abandon the patriarch of their family. Besides, Hooks (2000) asks women to sacrifice their individual interest for collective benefit, and in this case, Mariam even sacrificed her life to protect the interest of Laila and Aziza. In the end, she was satisfied that her life is not useless, and her death also freed her loved ones. She closed her eyes and fell on her knees to face firing squad with a feeling, “it was not bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way. Not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings” (p. 329).

4.2 Envy and Non-Cooperation in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Hooks (2000) opined, “As long as women are using class or race power to dominate other women, feminist sisterhood cannot be fully realised” (p. 16). This attitude was responsible for the destruction of Nana’s and Mariam’s lives in the novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Jalil Khan, already married to three women, entered into an illegitimate sexual relationship with his servant Nana. This relationship was revealed due to Nana’s pregnancy. Though Jalil was equally responsible for this relationship, he put the whole blame on Nana. In this situation, Jalil’s wives did not show any concern for their fellow woman, and they forced Jalil to cast out Nana to a far-flung village. In the light of Hooks (1986) philosophy, it can be revealed that the reason for Jalil’s wives’ hostile attitude towards Nana was their class difference. They were unable to bear with a woman of low class,

and they even want to punish her for daring to disturb the class structure. The pain and humiliation faced by Nana are evident in the following extract.

To Jalil and his wives, I was a pokeroot. A mugwort. You too. And you weren't even born yet. "What's a mugwort?" Mariam asked. "A weed," Nana said. "Something you rip out and toss aside". Mariam frowned internally (p. 8).

Next victim of female non-cooperation and class difference was Mariam herself. She also tried to break the shackles of class structure and left her poor mother to live with her rich father. Resultantly, she lost her mother and was forced to accept an elderly, illiterate and harsh man as her husband. Her stepmothers did not take pity on her even they had their real daughters of Mariam's age. Moreover, Jalil was willing to accept her daughter but did not find the courage to resist his wives. Therefore, the unjust behaviour of women (Jalil's wives) spoiled the lives of other women (Nana and Mariam). However, their wealth and class pride also proved temporary, and they lost it in the wake of war as written by Jalil in his letter, "Fear of losing face? Of staining my so-called good name? How little those things matter to me now after all the loss..." (p. 359). In short, the bond of solidarity and kinship would have rescued the lives of Nana and Mariam, but the non-cooperation led them to death and left repentance for the wives of Jalil.

4.3 Sisterhood in the Novel *And the Mountains Echoed*

The novel *And the Mountains Echoed* also presents some ideal examples of sisterhood. In chapter eight, the novelist narrates an exemplary show of sisterhood between Odelia and Madaline. They were comrades from their childhood, and they even promised to live as neighbours even after their marriage. As Hooks (1986) believes that women are the most affected group due to sexism, Madaline was also a victim of her father's inhumane behaviour. He was a drunkard, and he used to beat Madaline severely. One day she came to Odelia in a poor state and Odelia could not tolerate the condition of her friend. She did a heroic act, as shown in the following extract.

We walk right up to the door and there's my father, in the doorway, and Odie raises the barrel and shoves it against his chin and says, Do it again and I will come back and shoot you in the face with this rifle.... I look down and see..... a little circle quietly expanding on the floor between his bare feet (p. 296).

This show of solidarity and kinship rescued Madaline from the oppression of her father. Later on, Madaline exploited this relationship and left her daughter Thalia with Odelia for a few weeks but never returned. However, Odelia showed an absolute sense of sisterhood as advised by Hooks (1986). She did not care for her individual interest or Madaline's betrayal, but she treated Thalia as her daughter. Thalia had a disfigured face due to a dog's bite, and she always kept her face covered. Nevertheless, Odelia encouraged her to live a normal life without covering her face. Morgan (1970) genuinely acclaimed that sisterhood can transform the lives of women, and this fact was proved right in the case of Odelia, who through her courage, changed the lives of Madaline and Thalia.

Another act of courage, sisterhood and heroism is depicted in the relation of a young Afghan girl Roshi and a humanitarian worker Dr Amra. Roshi's face was disfigured, and her family was killed in a land dispute by her uncle. Dr Amra took a particular interest in her case and brought the girl back to life. Although she had to face many problems, she was able to arrange plastic surgery for Roshi. In the end, Roshi was a successful and famous writer. Therefore, Dr Amra was able to achieve self-actualisation through the success of Roshi and Roshi was able to get rid of sexism because of Dr Amra.

Hosseini presented another show of kinship, solidarity and sisterhood in the relation of Pari Abdullah and Pari Wahdati. Pari Wahdati was sold by her father to rescue his family from the plight of poverty. However, her brother Abdullah could not forget her, and he named her daughter after her sister. Abdullah always told her daughter stories of her aunt, Pari. Pari Abdullah grew up with a sense of kinship towards her aunt though she never met her aunt. Later on, they were able to meet in America as Pari Wahdati was living in France. Pari Abdullah had devoted her life to look after her father, but at his death, she felt that she is all alone in this world. However, she received a phone from Pari, and she invited her to live together in France. This offer filled Pari with gratitude and hope, "I am not alone. A sudden happiness catches me unawares. I feel it trickling into me, and my eyes go liquid with gratitude and hope" (p. 402). This depiction of love and kinship shows that sisterhood always rescues women, and it is such a pure relationship that it always encourages women to sacrifice personal benefits for the welfare of sister women.

4.4 Envy and Non-Cooperation in *And the Mountains Echoed*

Envy can spoil even the beautiful relationship between real sisters. Wollstonecraft (1992) was not an admirer of

the relationship of *love* as she wanted women to be on equal terms with men, and in her opinion, it was possible in the relationship of *friendship*. She believed that love only needs good looks, but friendship is long-lasting as it depends on intelligence. In addition, she thought that love could be a source of envy and as a result, spoil the relation of care and cooperation among women. Such an incident of envy is portrayed in Hosseini's novel *And the Mountains Echoed*. Parwana and Masooma were twin sisters, but the jealousy and mistrust tarnished the beautiful relation of sisterhood. They were in love with the same person named Saboor, but Saboor loved Masooma because of her exquisite beauty. However, Parwana could not resist her wild urge to marry Saboor, and her action wrecked the life of Masooma, as shown in the extract below.

And then the part that Masooma knew nothing about. While her sister was facing away, searching her pocket, Parwana planted the heels of her hands on the branch, lifted her bottom, and let it drop. The branch shook. Masooma gasped and lost her balance. Her arms flailed wildly (p. 67).

As a result, Masooma was handicapped and later on abandoned in the desert at her insistence. It proves that the sibling rivalry and love relationship can cause distrust among women which led them to feelings of envy and non-cooperation for each other (Ahmad, 2019; Yu, 2006). Moreover, this incident provides a typically patriarchal view of women bonding as patriarchy presents women as natural enemies betraying each other for men. Therefore, Hook (1986) was right that patriarchy teaches women not to believe in any kind of bonding or solidarity.

4.5 Comparison of Sisterhood and Envy in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*

Mohanty (2003) differentiated the concepts of sisterhood, as presented by Morgan (1970) and Reagon (1983). She believed that in Morgan's philosophy, the reason for solidarity among women is their "*shared experience*" but in the opinion of Reagon, the coalition of women is the result of their need to *survive*. It is evident that Hosseini has presented both shapes of sisterhood through his female characters. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the relationship of sisterhood between Mariam and Laila is formed because of their shared experience of miseries at the hands of Rasheed. Therefore, this experience led them to form a bond of solidarity. However, survival is the primary motive behind the coalition of female characters in *And the Mountains Echoed*. Madaline needed the help of Odelia because her survival was in danger at the hands of her abusive father. In addition, she again used Odelia to get rid of her daughter Thalia, who was a hindrance in her professional career. Thalia also needed the cooperation of either her mother or Odelia for her survival. Therefore, she had to depend on Odelia to lead a smooth life. Moreover, the support of Dr Amra was obligatory for Roshi in her attempts to find a way towards her existence. Similarly, Pari Abdullah was left alone in the world, and she needed someone to console her, and her aunt Pari Abdullah provided this companionship. All these instances prove that the sisterhood found in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a depiction of the ideals of Morgan and coalition of female characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* shows the glimpses of Reagon's philosophy.

The reasons for non-cooperation were also different in the novels under consideration. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the reason of non-cooperation among female characters was the differences of class, race and ethnicity but the cause of tension among female characters in *And the Mountains Echoed* was the kin rivalry and love relationship. Therefore, the relation of sisterhood can be destroyed due to any of the mentioned reasons.

5. Conclusion

Hosseini has put forth the ideology that sisterhood is a great way for women to fight against oppression. It is evident through the portrayal of female characters that sisterhood builds trust and kinship among them, and this association leads them to ultimate salvation. The fight and victory of Laila and Mariam against the representative of patriarchy (Rasheed) prove that sisterhood is powerful. The ideal sisterhood of Odelia towards Madaline and Thalia, the cross-cultural kinship of Dr Amra and Roshi, and the beautiful relationship of Pari Abdullah and Pari Wahdati prove that sisterhood is global and it will remain the saviour of women forever. On the other hand, envy and non-cooperation cause mistrust among women and it makes them easy prey for the patriarchal forces. Patriarchy always encourages women to consider other women as their enemies and proposes their bonding to men as the only solution for women. Therefore, the victims of envy act as the peripheries of patriarchy and they prove fatal for the individual and collective solidarity of women. The discussion proves that the lives of Nana and Mariam were shattered due to non-cooperation of their fellow women in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Similarly, envy led Parwana to handicap her real sister in *And the Mountains Echoed*.

Afghanistan is a traditional patriarchal society and women are the most ill-treated section of society. Girls are a least wanted commodity, and a family is considered unfortunate to have a baby girl. They are restricted to their houses and face domestic violence at the hands of their near relatives. They do not have any say in the decisions making process and decisions regarding their education and marriage are always taken by the male head of the

family. It is considered legal to barter or sell a woman in the name of marriage. Moreover, women need to accompany a near male relative to visit a marketplace or hospital in most parts of the country (Gu, 2017). Hence, Afghan women are connected through a shared experience of sexism and oppression, and they need a combined struggle to overcome these barriers. Roslan, Ab Rashid, Yunus and Azmi (2016) believe that fiction is based on reality, and it can draw or change the perception of an individual towards a cultural reality. Therefore, it can be soundly assumed that the truth about Afghan women is portrayed through the fictional characters of Hosseini. Mariam, Laila and Adil's mother were forced to marry against their wishes. Further, Mariam was not allowed to get education. Moreover, Mariam, Laila, Nana, Rosh and Nila faced domestic violence and harassment in their lives. However, it is established in the discussion that these female characters were able to overcome these miseries through a show of solidarity and sisterhood. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is vital for Afghan women in their fight against sexism that they maintain a strong bond of sisterhood and avoid the feelings of envy and hatred for their fellow women. This relation of sisterhood can prove a source of their emancipation and a powerful tool against the patriarchal oppression.

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