

Exploring Subaltern Identity in the Postcolonial Context: Resistance and Agency in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This study aims to explore the concept of subaltern identity in the two works of Khalid Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Drawing on Spivak's "subaltern theory," this paper aims to examine how the characters of both novels interact with their oppressors and express their reactions to the forces that shape the subaltern experience.

Methodology: This paper utilizes postcolonial theory to explore the subaltern identity of the characters in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It examines how the characters are subjected to a specific form of marginalization and exclusion based on their social status. It looks at how characters' identities are shaped by their religion, ethnicity, and gender. The paper also examines how characters such as Amir and Mariam use their resources to fight for a better future for the subalterns.

Findings: Through an analysis of the themes of power, marginalization, and gender, this paper reveals how the characters of both novels navigate the complexities of their subaltern identities and work to resist the structures of oppression they encounter. It shows how the characters are subjected to a specific form of marginalization and exclusion based on their social status, and how they use their resources to fight for a better future for the subalterns.

Conclusion: This paper concludes that characters in both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are able to navigate the complexities of their subaltern identities and work to resist the structures of oppression they encounter. Through an analysis of the themes of power, marginalization, and gender, this paper has revealed how characters use their resources to fight for a better future for the subalterns. The paper has also highlighted how postcolonial theory can be used to examine the subaltern identity of characters in works of literature.

Keywords: Subaltern, Identity, Sacrifice, Repentance, Difference, Marginalization, Agency.

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Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's novels, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, are widely studied by researchers due to their compelling and thought-provoking themes. They provide readers with a deep understanding of the social and political issues in Afghanistan, as well as the struggles of Afghan women. Banu (2016) argues that both novels are heavily infused with themes of discrimination, war, and redemption. Kabeer and Chaudhary (2020) further explore the themes of discrimination, war, and the ostracizing of Afghan minorities in both novels. They argue that the novels provide readers with a deeper understanding of the conflicts that have occurred in Afghanistan and the consequences of these events. Additionally, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* highlights the struggles of Afghan women in a patriarchal society, and how they find ways to fight for their rights and dignity. Both novels provide readers with a nuanced understanding of the social and political issues in Afghanistan.

Siahmansouri and Hoorvash (2020) provide a postcolonial interpretation of the narrative structure in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, suggesting that the novel depicts a dichotomous cultural representation of the West and East. They argue that the West is presented as heroic, while the East is portrayed as villainous. Yeasmin and Islam (2021) investigate the concept of parenthood in the two novels, noting that parenthood is depicted as a source of strength for the characters. The authors also discuss the idea of parental guilt and how it impacts the development of the characters. Hosseini's works provide a unique insight into the lives of Afghan women.

Joyia and Gull (2017) examine the resilience of women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and how they continue to fight for their rights despite the inequality and oppression in their society. They argue that Hosseini's novels give readers a realistic portrayal of the struggles Afghan women face every day. Andrews (2016) examines how the female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be seen as modern archetypes, and how they show the struggles of women in Afghanistan. Jana (2013) argues that the characters in the novel are examples of endurance and emancipation, discussing how the novel challenges traditional gender roles and provides a positive representation of female characters. Sentov (2011) focuses on how the novel portrays female characters amidst the political and cultural clashes in Afghanistan, noting how the novel shows how women can resist oppression and gain strength. The characters in both of Hosseini's novels have been analyzed as powerful symbols of strength and resilience, highlighting the struggles of women in Afghanistan and the importance of resistance and emancipation.

This study explores the works of Khalid Hosseini to examine the concept of subaltern identity by revealing the marginalization and oppression of those who are excluded from mainstream society. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir and Hassan are both marginalized due to their differing social statuses. As a Hazara, Hassan is subject to discrimination and persecution due to his ethnicity, while Amir is privileged due to his family's status. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam and Laila are both marginalized due to their gender and poverty. They are both subjected to oppression and abuse due to their gender, and their voices are silenced and ignored in a patriarchal society.

The concept of 'subaltern' identity has been explored by various scholars over the decades. The term 'subaltern' originates from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who used it to refer to those who were excluded from mainstream society. Contemporary theorist Gayatri Spivak coined the term 'subaltern' to refer to those who are marginalized within postcolonial societies. Spivak's 'subaltern theory' is rooted in the idea that the subaltern are those who are marginalized and silenced by the dominant culture and power structures. Subaltern identity is a complex phenomenon, as it is not limited to one particular group or culture, but instead encompasses a variety of identities, including those of gender, race, and class. This study explores the concept of subaltern identity by examining the postcolonial works of Khalid Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Through a critical analysis of these two works, it attempts to define subaltern identity in the context of the postcolonial world.

Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) are two postcolonial works that explore the concept of subaltern identity in the postcolonial context. *The Kite Runner* is set in Afghanistan and follows the story of Amir, a young boy from a privileged background, and his friend Hassan, a Hazara. The story is set against the backdrop of the Soviet-Afghan War and follows Amir's persecution of Hassan due to their differing social statuses. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is set in Afghanistan and follows the story of two women, Mariam and Laila, who are united by their shared experiences of oppression, poverty, and suffering under the Taliban regime. Both stories explore the concept of subaltern identity in a postcolonial context, as they reveal the marginalization, oppression, and persecution of those who are excluded from mainstream society.

In order to understand and define subaltern identity, it is necessary to examine the works of Gayatri Spivak. Spivak's 'subaltern theory' is rooted in the idea that the subaltern are those who are marginalized and silenced by the dominant culture and power structures. According to Spivak, the subaltern are those who have been excluded from the process of decision-making in postcolonial societies and thus have no voice. The subaltern are those who have been denied access to education, healthcare, and other basic human rights, and whose voices are not heard or acknowledged in the postcolonial world.

The concept of subaltern identity is complex, as it encompasses a variety of identities including those of gender, race, and class. Subaltern identity is not limited to one particular group or culture but instead encompasses a variety of identities that are marginalized and silenced by the dominant power structures. In the postcolonial context, subaltern identity is defined as the experience of those who are excluded from mainstream society and who are denied access to education, healthcare, and other basic human rights.

The subaltern identity is often a neglected and overlooked concept in postcolonial studies, particularly when it comes to literature. However, this concept has been explored in literature in remarkable ways, particularly in works by Khalid Hosseini. *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, two of his most popular works, explore the struggle of the subaltern and the oppression they face in a postcolonial context.

Khaled Hosseini's first novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003), is renowned worldwide for portraying the coming-of-age of two boys in 1970s Afghanistan. It presents the prevalent ethnic strife in late 20th century Afghanistan through the relationship between Amir and Hassan, as they try to comprehend the complex social and family hierarchies. Amir and his father Baba live in an attractive residence in Kabul, with two of their servants, Ali and Hassan. Amir is a Pushtun and Ali and Hassan are Hazaras, a minority group in the region. Rahim Khan, Baba's close associate, often visits the home, and the people in the house have conversations about politics, football, and business. Amir and Hassan, who are of the same age, often play together and Hassan is a master in kite running.

This novel is told through the use of a flashback narration technique, and the characters are largely driven by nostalgia. Kite flying is a major sport in Afghanistan, celebrated annually in the winter. Boys compete in the tournament with enthusiasm, using various materials to sharpen the kite's flying string. When a kite is cut, the boys strive to catch it, hence the term "Kite Runner" for those who catch the kite. Amir wins the tournament, while Hassan is left to catch the losing kite. He is then ambushed by three bullies - Wali, Kamal, and Assef - in a dead-end. Asif then proceeds to rape Hassan, and Amir watches the entire incident but does not intervene. This moment marks the beginning of the divide between Amir and Hassan, and it is only solidified when Amir puts money and watches under Hassan's pillow, prompting Hassan to take the blame and leave with his father Ali.

War in Afghanistan has caused many Afghans to relocate, including Amir and Baba who travel to America through Pakistan. At a checkpoint, a Russian soldier demands that a female be raped, but Baba bravely intervenes, and the soldier retreats. Once in America, Amir continues his education while Baba works at a gas station. On Sunday, they attend a flea market and meet General Tahri and his daughter Soraya. A silent understanding of love passes between them that leads to their eventual marriage, although Baba is later diagnosed with lung cancer and dies.

Amir is now an adult who has settled in America. He receives a call from Rahim Khan, an old friend of his father, who is now ill and wants to see him. Amir travels to the war-ravaged country and is overwhelmed by what he sees. Afghanistan appears to be in ruins, with poverty and hunger widespread, and the precious culture of the land being destroyed. Rahim Khan informs him of the destructiveness of the Taliban, who have closed down schools and universities, banned basic necessities and pleasures of life, and targeted women. They have also killed Hassan and his wife Farzana and sent their son Sohrab to an orphanage. Amir is asked to find Sohrab and take care of both the house and him.

Amir tries to find Sohrab and with the help of a local person, eventually ends up at an orphanage. This place is in very poor condition and the children are dressed in ragged clothing. The director tells Amir that the Taliban took Sohrab away. Amir then goes to the soccer stadium where he finds Assef, the Taliban official. Amir confronts him and a life-threatening fight ensues. Sohrab intervenes and saves Amir using a slingshot. Amir is then able to take Sohrab back with him, but not without much difficulty. Rahim Khan later reveals to Amir that Hassan was not only his servant but also his half-brother, as Baba had a relationship with Hassan's mother, Sanaubar. This makes Amir feel even guiltier, as he had betrayed Hassan in both the rape and theft incidents.

Amir took Sohrab to America, determined to protect him from the dangers of Kabul. On their first day there, they went to Lake Elizabeth Park in Fremont and saw people flying kites. Amir brought one and asked Sohrab to fly it, telling him about when he and Sohrab's father were young and would fly kites together. He taught Sohrab how to fly the kite and how to run and catch it when it got away. Amir chased the kite for Sohrab and the people around them smiled. Sohrab smiled too.

In 2007, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released and achieved enormous success. The novel illustrates 30 years of Afghan history and tells an emotional story of a family and friendship between people of lower classes. Mariam hears the word "Harami" for the first time from her mother Nana, who lives in a village outside of Herat, Afghanistan. They are restricted to their own village, Gul Daman, and Nana works as a housekeeper for a wealthy cinema owner, Jalil. He has three wives and eleven children, all of whom are legitimate except for Mariam. Jalil would visit Mariam and Nana every Thursday and spend the weekend with them, bringing gifts and telling stories. Mariam has great admiration for her father, and Mullah Faizulla, a religious teacher, helps Mariam with her problems and teaches her the Koran.

One day, Mariam begged her dad to take her to the movies to watch "Pinocchio". Jalil agreed but eventually did not fulfill his promise. Upset, Mariam left the house and knocked on the jail door, but received no answer. She spent the night outside and waited for Jalil. The next day, Jalil's driver took her back to the Kolba and her mother, Nana, committed suicide. Mariam then endured a period of great difficulty and suffering. At Nana's funeral, Jalil took Mariam to his house, where he and his wife forced her to marry an older man named Rasheed. Mariam protested, but no one listened. Rasheed took her to Kabul, and at first, he was nice to her. Eventually, though, he became abusive and used vulgar language and physical punishment. Mariam got pregnant seven times, but experienced miscarriages due to health issues.

Laila, who hails from an urban, liberal background, was born and raised in the city. She has a romantic relationship with her neighbor, Tariq, who loses his leg in a mine explosion. Tragically, her two brothers, Noor and Ahmad, are killed in the war between Russia and Afghanistan. The news devastates their mother, Fariba, who remains in a state of shock and constantly remembers her deceased sons. The environment is filled with fear and chaos. Despite the circumstances, her father still sends her to school. Tariq and Laila eventually have an intimate relationship. Hakim, Laila's father, wishes to leave the country, but Fariba does not agree. After a few weeks, Tariq departed from Afghanistan and Laila's house was destroyed due to a bomb blast. She was the only survivor and was knocked out. She was taken to Rasheed's house where she was taken care of and recovered, though her hearing remained impaired. She was informed of Tariq's death and was overcome with grief. The marriage of Laila and Rasheed was held at Rasheed's place which was marked by a quarrel between Rasheed and Mariam. Laila was already

pregnant and Rasheed was delighted at the thought of having a son. Ultimately, a female baby was born and named Aziza.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban have taken control and are enforcing oppressive laws on women. Under the rule of Rasheed, women are not allowed to travel, shop, or receive an education. They must also strictly adhere to a veil law. Mariam and Laila plan to flee and save up money to give to an agent, but the policeman ends up delivering them back to Rasheed. He becomes extremely harsh, locking them in a hot room with no food or water and threatening to kill them.

Laila gives birth to a son, Salami, and Rasheed is overjoyed. He showers the baby with gifts and lavish items, but soon after, the war begins. Rasheed's shop is burned down and the family falls into a period of poverty and hunger. Mariam attempts to ask her father, Jalil, for help but discovers he has already passed away. Aziza is sent to an orphanage, though Rasheed refuses to visit it. The Taliban punish Laila and Mariam for being alone by beating them. To provide for his family, Rasheed becomes a waiter at a hotel.

Laila was stunned when she stumbled upon Tariq on the doorstep of Rasheed's. Tears streamed down her face as they embraced each other. Tariq then recounted his experiences in a refugee camp, prison, and his release. He was now a janitor at a hotel. Laila told him of her marriage, the birth of her daughter, Aziza, and Rasheed's cruel behavior. Eventually, Zalami revealed their secret, enraging Rasheed who then beat Laila and wanted to kill her. Mariam intervened, using a shovel to protect Laila, which resulted in Rasheed's death. Knowing the consequences, Laila wanted to leave this nightmare behind and take Mariam with her and Tariq, but Mariam refused, as it would put Laila and her children in danger. So they fled to Pakistan, and Laila never saw Mariam again. Laila and Tariq got married, built a new home, and started a life together. The tragedy of 9/11 brought a huge shift in Afghanistan and the US president declared a "war on terror". This war led to the downfall of the Taliban. Things in Afghanistan began to improve. Both Laila and Tariq were determined to go back to Afghanistan and help rebuild it.

This study explores the concept of subaltern identity in these two works, discussing the various ways in which the subaltern is oppressed, the strategies they use to resist, and the implications of their resistance.

Study Objectives

1. To understand how the characters of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* navigate their subaltern identities. 2. To explore how characters such as Amir and Mariam use their resources to fight for a better future for the subalterns. 3. To examine how characters are subjected to a specific form of marginalization and exclusion based on their social status. 4. To analyze how the themes of power, marginalization, and gender shape the subaltern identity of the characters in these two novels.

Research Questions

1. What are the key elements that define a subaltern identity in the postcolonial context? 2. How do the characters of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* interact with their oppressors and express their reactions to the forces that shape the subaltern experience? 3. What strategies do characters use to resist the structures of oppression they encounter? 4. How do religion, ethnicity, and gender shape the characters' identities in these two novels?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it helps to further our understanding of the complexities of subaltern identity in the postcolonial context. It provides insight into how the characters of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* use their resources to fight for a better future for themselves and the subalterns. This paper also examines how the characters are subjected to a specific form of marginalization and exclusion based on their social status, and how the themes of power, marginalization, and gender shape their identities.

Problem Statement

This paper seeks to explore how the characters of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* navigate their subaltern identities and resist the structures of oppression they encounter in the postcolonial context.

Theoretical Framework

In the twentieth century, after the colonization of the third world, the concept of Subaltern Studies gained recognition. The term Subaltern was first used by philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1999) about the working-class people of the Soviet Union. He was particularly interested in the history of the working class and believed that the ruling class viewed them as inferior. This meant that the ruling class was able to gain hegemony and become the elite, while the working class was left in a subordinate position. The term Subaltern, therefore, refers to a lower rank or status and is used to describe the marginalized and disadvantaged. Following Gramsci, various scholars of the post-colonial era have debated the concept of Subaltern Studies, which looks at the subordination of people in South Asia regardless of gender, class, race, or religion. As time elapsed, a group of intellectuals: Brennan, 1984; Ranajit Guha, 1989; Chatterjee & Pandey, 1992; Arnold & Hardiman 1994; Amin & Chatterjee, 1997; Amin and Chakrabarty, 1997) created the Subaltern Studies that explored history, economy, politics, identity, and sociology. Through their study of the five volumes, these five academics were able to provide a voice for those who had been previously unheard.

Several academics, such as Gayatri Spivak, Ranjit Guha, and Edward Said, adopted the concepts of subaltern and orientalism in their work. Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985) tackled the issue of how a subaltern is often voiceless due to a patriarchal-dominated society. Meanwhile, Said's work on Orientalism focused on the post-colonial experience. Spivak applied Derrida's deconstructive technique to explore how subject formation and the concept of othering play a role. This led her to the conclusion that due to the oppressive patriarchal system, a subaltern can't speak. Mani (1998), another critic of subaltern studies, pointed out that while men have found a way to express themselves, women have had difficulty doing so. Mani argued that subalterns should be given their voice back, recover their identity, and reclaim their ability to express themselves. Mohanty (1991, 2003) believes that women are presented as objects in a patriarchal society, which reinforces and exaggerates the power of men in terms of social status and domestic subordination. This is an idea that has been prevalent for centuries, as suggested by the work of feminist scholars (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949; Hooks, 1992; Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 1989; Beechey, 1979; Lerner, 1986, Ebert, 1991; Alexander & Mohanty, 1996; Johnson, 2004; Facio, 2013) who argued that women were viewed as weak, fragile and less important in a male-dominated society. The notion that women are subordinate and less important than men has been further reinforced in literature, art, and popular culture (Lloyd, 1993). This view of women is still seen in many parts of the world today.

The Subaltern Studies are an amalgamation of Marxist theory, Post-structuralism, the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, and the ongoing conflict between the West and South Asia. Spivak points out that the colonizers may have left the region, but their impact remains ingrained in the minds of those who were subjugated.

In contrast to Spivak, Parry (1987, 1994, 2004, and 2012) argues that the subaltern was not entirely voiceless, instead, their voices were heard in the nationalist discourses of resistance and post-colonial narratives. Parry suggests that the power of the hegemonic discourse has given the subaltern a platform to express their narratives and interpretations, rather than being completely silenced. Furthermore, she argues that colonizers have amplified the voices of the native people. She disagrees with Spivak's idea that the native has no part in the story of colonialism, and brings attention to the native's agency in India's two-hundred-year resistance against British rule. She argues that the dismissal of nationalist discourses of resistance is accompanied by the exaggerated role of the postcolonial woman intellectual. It is up to her to create a narrative, unravel a story, and give the marginalized a place in history by utilizing the resources

of deconstruction "in the service of reading" to form a critique of imperialism instead of a theory. Gayatri Spivak's "alternative narrative of colonialism", through her insightful readings of texts which uncovers the lies and exclusions in the archival text, works to defy the power of the established historical record and reintroduce the erased signs of native awareness. It is for this reason that her work should be evaluated. She further argues that to govern and exploit resources, the native was depicted as a programmed, "nearly-solved" other of the European and not as its binary opposite. This is what her account aims to disperse by breaking down the rigid, single categories that the narrative relies on. She suggests that the oppressive behavior of colonial power is more subtle than simply controlling the oppressed mass. The European representative can manipulate the natives by making them accept the knowledge created by the master, which causes them to view themselves as "others". This process causes the natives to internalize foreign knowledge and makes them see the world differently (Parry, 2004: 20).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research project is a qualitative study that utilizes a descriptive approach. The primary source material is the two novels by Khalid Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The research is guided by the theoretical framework of Spivak's 'subaltern theory', and relies on the analysis of the characters' actions, interactions, and expressions of their lived experiences.

Sampling

The focus of this research is on the two novels by Khalid Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). These two novels were chosen as they both explore the experiences of characters who are part of the subaltern identity and have been widely acclaimed for their insight into the lives of the oppressed in postcolonial societies. Technique: The technique used for this research project is a critical analysis of the characters and their interactions, as well as their expression of their reactions to the forces that shape their subaltern identity. The research utilizes a descriptive approach and relies on the analysis of the characters' actions, interactions, and expressions of their lived experiences.

Variables

The primary variable in this study is the exploration of subaltern identity in the postcolonial context through an examination of Khalid Hosseini's novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Other variables include themes such as power, marginalization, and gender to reveal how the characters of both novels navigate the complexities of their subaltern identities and work to resist the structures of oppression they encounter.

Operationalization of Variables

Operationalization of variables in research is the process of defining and measuring specific variables that are used in the research. It involves assigning operational definitions to the variables in order to make them measurable and quantifiable. Operationalization helps to make the research more valid and reliable and allows for the comparison of results across studies.

Operationalization of variables can be applied in analyzing a novel. The variables that could be operationalized for a novel include the number and type of characters, the plot structure, the setting, the themes, and the writing style. These variables can be measured, for example, by counting the number of characters, categorizing the plot structure, and identifying the themes and writing style. This allows us to compare different novels and draw conclusions about their similarities and differences.

The research is operationalized by a critical analysis of the characters and their interactions, as well as their expression of their reactions to the forces that shape the subaltern experience. The research also explores themes such as power, marginalization, and gender in order to reveal how the characters of both

novels navigate the complexities of their subaltern identities and work to resist the structures of oppression they encounter.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique used in this research project is a qualitative approach. The primary source material is the two novels by Khalid Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The research relies on the analysis of the characters' actions, interactions, and expressions of their lived experiences. The data is analyzed through an examination of the subaltern identity of the characters through the lens of postcolonial theory. The analysis explores themes such as power, marginalization, and gender to reveal how the characters of both novels navigate the complexities of their subaltern identities and work to resist the structures of oppression they encounter.

Analysis

The subaltern theory is a postcolonial concept that originated in the field of postcolonial studies and is closely associated with the work of Gayatri Spivak. It is a framework used to understand the power dynamics of a colonial system, as well as the role of the subaltern, which is the term used for people who exist outside of mainstream society. The subaltern theory is based on the premise that the power structure of colonial systems is often skewed in favor of the dominant class, and that marginalized and oppressed groups are often excluded from power and decision-making processes. The subaltern theory is used to examine how the power dynamics of a colonial system shape individual and collective identities, as well as how the power structure of a colonizer-colonized relationship impacts the lives of subalterns.

This study examines the concept of subaltern identity in the postcolonial context, as seen in the works of Khalid Hosseini, specifically in his novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Through analysis of Hosseini's works, this study explores how his characters experience the power dynamics of a colonial system and how these dynamics shape their identities. Furthermore, it addresses the themes of sacrifice, repentance, difference, marginalization, and agency within a subaltern identity in the postcolonial context.

Defining Subaltern Identity

The term 'subaltern' is derived from the Latin word 'subalternus' meaning 'inferior' or 'of lower rank' (Spivak, 1988, p. 243). It is used in the discourse of Postcolonial Studies to denote those marginalized, oppressed, and discriminated against in society, particularly those within the former colonies of European empires. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'subaltern theory', which is presented in her 1988 essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', is a powerful tool in understanding subaltern identity in the postcolonial context. According to Spivak, a subaltern is an individual from a low-status social group who is denied access to power and influence (Spivak, 1988, p. 270). Spivak's 'subaltern theory' serves to highlight the power dynamics that exist in postcolonial societies. She notes that the subaltern is denied access to 'power, prestige, or property' (Spivak, 1988, p. 271). The subaltern is also denied access to the 'speaking position', or the 'public apparatus of language' (Spivak, 1988, p. 272). This means that the subaltern is excluded from participating in public discourse and therefore their voices are not heard in the postcolonial context.

The power dynamics of the postcolonial context also serve to complicate subaltern identity. Spivak argues that the subaltern is 'a subject who is constituted in the structure of domination' (Spivak, 1988, p. 273). This means that the subaltern is not only excluded from the 'speaking position', but is also subjected to the power dynamics of the postcolonial context. This means that the subaltern is not only denied access to power but is also subject to the oppressive and discriminatory practices of the postcolonial context.

Khalid Hosseini's novels *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) are useful tools for exploring subaltern identity in the postcolonial context. Both novels are set in Afghanistan, which was

a former colony of the British Empire, and the characters in both novels are subject to the power dynamics of the postcolonial context.

The Kite Runner follows Amir, a privileged, upper-class Afghani boy, as he navigates the postcolonial context. Amir is from a wealthy family and is afforded certain privileges as a result. His friend Hassan, however, is from a lower-class background and is subjected to discrimination and oppression due to his social standing. In The Kite Runner, Hassan is a clear example of a subaltern, as he is denied access to power, prestige and property. Furthermore, he is denied access to the 'speaking position', as he is unable to participate in public discourse and his voice is not heard.

A Thousand Splendid Suns follows the stories of two women, Mariam and Laila, as they navigate the postcolonial context. Both women are subject to the power dynamics of the postcolonial context, as they are denied access to power, prestige, and property. Furthermore, both women are denied access to the 'speaking position', as they are unable to participate in public discourse and their voices are not heard. Mariam and Laila are also subjected to discrimination and oppression due to their gender, which serves to further complicate their subaltern identities.

Subaltern Identity in the Kite Runner

The Kite Runner is a novel by Khalid Hosseini that centers on the story of Amir, a young Afghan boy growing up in Kabul in the 1970s. The novel explores the concept of subaltern identity in many ways, most notably through its exploration of the oppression of the Hazara people. The Hazara are a minority ethnic group in Afghanistan who have long been the target of discrimination and oppression by the ruling Pashtun majority. In the novel, the Hazara are represented by the character of Hassan, a Hazara boy who is Amir's servant and best friend. Through Hassan, the novel explores how the Hazara are oppressed in Afghanistan, including the fact that Hassan is never allowed to attend school and is instead relegated to the role of a servant. The novel also explores how the Hazara people try to resist their oppression. However, the novel ultimately shows that these strategies are not enough to overcome the institutionalized oppression of the Hazara people.

Hassan is portrayed as a puppet with no will of his own, as he is entirely subject to the will of others. The hardwood symbolizes the hardships he has gone through, while the bamboo leaves symbolize how he gives shade to the tired and weary. Assef is the antagonist, born to a German mother and Afghan father, and his brass knuckles symbolize his oppressive and tyrannical nature. He idolizes Hitler and desires ethnic cleansing, and even gives Amir a copy of Hitler's biography as a gift. Pushtuns are the native people of Afghanistan and Assef believes that the Hazara people are contaminating their land and "unclean their blood".

In The Kite Runner, Hassan (from the Hazara ethnic group) is treated as inferior by Amir, who fails to protect him from the brutality of Assef and his gang. Later, Amir himself is made to feel powerless by Assef and the ensuing war.

In the later part of the Novel, both Amir and Baba have to take refuge in America. Baba's reputation in American society is affected by the circumstances in which he finds himself helpless. When the shopkeeper at the grocery store asked for his ID, Baba felt his sense of integrity being questioned. He was surprised to find such distrust in the new country. Compared to his old life in Kabul, Baba is now in a lower social standing. This is a difficult transition for him, and it makes him angry. He is forced to confront a new reality where he is no longer seen as someone important. Baba exclaims with surprise:

"This man wishes to check my license. We have been buying the foodstuffs from his shop for two years and this cur requires my license. What a strange country it is? The individual does not trust anyone" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 139).

The experience of Baba in the new country is a representation of the identity of the subaltern. His status in America is changed drastically, as he is now viewed with distrust and suspicion. This is a transformation

of his identity, as he is no longer seen as someone important. He is now in a lower social standing and is forced to confront a new reality. This is an example of how the subaltern can experience a loss of identity and have to grapple with a changed sense of self when they are subjected to new social environments.

Subaltern Identity in A Thousand Splendid Suns

A Thousand Splendid Suns explores the concept of subaltern identity in the postcolonial context. The novel follows the story of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila, as they face the various forms of oppression they experience due to their gender in post-Taliban Afghanistan. The novel explores the various ways in which women are oppressed in the postcolonial context, including through their lack of access to education and employment, their lack of autonomy over their own lives, and their lack of legal rights. The novel also explores the various strategies that women use to resist oppression.

Mariam is subjugated and oppressed by both Rasheed and Jalil's other wives. Hosseini explores the subjugated perspectives of men who have been silenced due to the effects of war and the control of the locals. His second novel focuses on the state of women, polygamy, and women's increasing revolt against patriarchal power. Both books discuss a particular community and explore the overlooked "subaltern female voices" that Gayatri Spivak claims can't be heard due to their oppressed state. However, the subaltern can express themselves through action, resistance, and revolt in order to be heard. Who will pay attention to these unheard voices of the subaltern?

The situation of female subalternity is apparent when Mariam is held accountable for her husband's death. The Taliban jury does not give due consideration to the evidence and does not carry out the principles of justice. Mariam attempts to defend herself by presenting evidence such as broken teeth and punishment cuts, yet this is disregarded and classified as a private matter between husband and wife. The judge then pronounces the death sentence on Mariam and puts her on public display for the execution.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is an important theme in both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as it is often used as a way for characters to cope with their oppression and make sense of their lives. The concept of sacrifice is seen in *The Kite Runner* through the character of Hassan, who chooses to sacrifice his own happiness in order to protect the protagonist, Amir. Hassan is a Hazara, an ethnic minority group in Afghanistan that has been oppressed by the dominant Pashtun group. Despite being treated as an outcast in Afghan society, Hassan still chooses to protect Amir at all costs, even when it means sacrificing his own safety and happiness. His willingness to sacrifice himself for Amir's benefit shows how his identity as a subaltern has shaped his sense of self and his understanding of the world.

The idea of sacrifice is also seen in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where Mariam and Laila are both forced to make sacrifices to survive in their oppressive environment. Mariam is forced to sacrifice her dreams of a better life to stay with her abusive husband, and Laila is forced to sacrifice her relationship with Tariq to protect him from the Taliban. Both characters demonstrate how their subaltern identities have shaped their sense of self and their understanding of the world. By sacrificing their own desires, they can survive in a society where they are seen as outcasts.

Repentance

Repentance is an important theme in *The Kite Runner*, as it is used to explore the idea of redemption and how it relates to subaltern identity. Amir is a Pashtun, a dominant group in Afghanistan, and he uses his privilege to bully Hassan, a Hazara. After years of guilt, Amir eventually finds redemption by returning to Afghanistan and helping Hassan's son, Sohrab. His decision to return and help Sohrab shows how his identity as a subaltern has shaped his understanding of redemption and his desire to repent for his past sins.

The idea of repentance is also seen in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where both Mariam and Laila experience redemption through their acts of mercy. Mariam is able to find redemption when she shows

mercy to the Taliban by giving them food and shelter, and Laila is able to find redemption when she helps the refugees who are fleeing from the Taliban. Both characters demonstrate how their identities as subalterns have shaped their understanding of redemption and their desire to repent for their past sins. By showing mercy to those who have wronged them, they are able to find redemption in a society where they are seen as outcasts.

Difference

Difference is an important theme in both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as it is used to explore the idea of the outsider and how it relates to subaltern identity. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir is constantly reminded of his difference from Hassan, a Hazara, which serves to highlight the power dynamics of a colonial system. Despite Amir's privileged position as a Pashtun, he is still seen as an outsider in Afghan society because of his differences from Hassan. This serves to show how his identity as a subaltern has shaped his understanding of the world and his sense of self.

The idea of difference is also seen in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where Mariam and Laila are both seen as outsiders in Afghan society because of their gender and their status as women. Mariam and Laila are not only seen as outsiders because of their gender, but also because of their different social backgrounds. Mariam is an illegitimate child, while Laila is from a more privileged background. This serves to show how their identities as subalterns have shaped their understanding of the world and their sense of self. By being seen as outsiders in a society where they are already marginalized, they are able to find strength in their differences and use it to survive in a hostile environment.

Marginalization

Marginalization is an important theme in both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as it is used to explore the idea of oppression and how it relates to subaltern identity. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir is constantly reminded of his privilege as a Pashtun, and of Hassan's oppression as a Hazara. This serves to highlight the power dynamics of a colonial system and how it creates a hierarchy of privilege and oppression. Amir's privileged position as a Pashtun serves to show how his identity as a subaltern has shaped his understanding of the world and his sense of self.

The idea of marginalization is also seen in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where Mariam and Laila are both subjected to oppression because of their gender and their status as women. Mariam and Laila are not only oppressed because of their gender, but also because of their different social backgrounds. Mariam is a harami, an illegitimate child, while Laila is from a more privileged background. This serves to show how their identities as subalterns have shaped their understanding of the world and their sense of self. By being subjected to oppression in a society where they are already marginalized, they are able to find strength in their differences and use it to survive in a hostile environment.

Agency

Agency is an important theme in both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as it is used to explore the idea of self-determination and how it relates to subaltern identity. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir is able to find a sense of agency when he chooses to return to Afghanistan and help Hassan's son, Sohrab. His decision to return and help Sohrab shows how his identity as a subaltern has shaped his understanding of self-determination and his desire to take control of his life.

The idea of agency is also seen in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where Mariam and Laila are both able to find a sense of self-determination by standing up to their oppressive environment. Mariam is able to find agency when she stands up to her abusive husband and refuses to be treated as a second-class citizen, and Laila is able to find agency when she stands up to the Taliban and refuses to give in to their demands. Both characters demonstrate how their identities as subalterns have shaped their understanding of self-determination and their desire to take control of their lives. By standing up to their oppressors, they are able to find strength in their differences and use it to survive in a hostile environment. Parry's idea of

resistance can be observed in Mariam and Laila's accounts of resistance, Hosseini gives voice to the subaltern characters and their Agency can be noticed clearly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the concept of subaltern identity in the postcolonial context. The works of Khalid Hosseini have provided insight into the experience of those who are marginalized and silenced within the postcolonial societies. Through a critical analysis of these works, it attempts to define subaltern identity in the context of the postcolonial world. The concept of subaltern identity is complex, as it encompasses a variety of identities, including those of gender, race and class. Subaltern identity is not limited to one particular group or culture but instead encompasses a variety of identities that are marginalized and silenced by the dominant power structures. In the postcolonial context, subaltern identity is defined as the experience of those who are excluded from mainstream society and who are denied access to education, healthcare, and other basic human rights.

Through analysis of Hosseini's works, this study has examined how characters experience the power dynamics of a colonial system and how these dynamics shape their identities. Furthermore, it addresses the themes of sacrifice, repentance, difference, marginalization, and agency within a subaltern identity in the postcolonial context. By exploring these themes, it has highlighted how subaltern identity is shaped by the power dynamics of a colonial system, as well as how subalterns are able to find strength in their differences and use it to survive in a hostile environment.

It discusses how the subaltern are oppressed, the strategies they use to resist, and the implications of their resistance. Through its exploration of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the study has shown that the subaltern are often marginalized and oppressed in postcolonial contexts, and that their attempts to resist are often met with limited success. Nevertheless, it has also shown that the subaltern are not powerless and that their resistance can have a real impact, even if it is not always immediately obvious. Benita Parry believes that we should revisit the knowledge that has been suppressed in the past and make sure that the voices of marginalized people are heard. This research is in line with Parry's idea of resistance, which can be seen in Khalid Hosseini's works where the subaltern voices can be heard and their Agency can be noticed clearly.

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