

**THE PROTEAN HIERARCHY: MANIFESTATION OF SOCIAL  
DOMINANCE IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER* AND  
*A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS***

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# IS DOMINANCE A CO-OPERATIVE GAME? A STUDY OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER* AND *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

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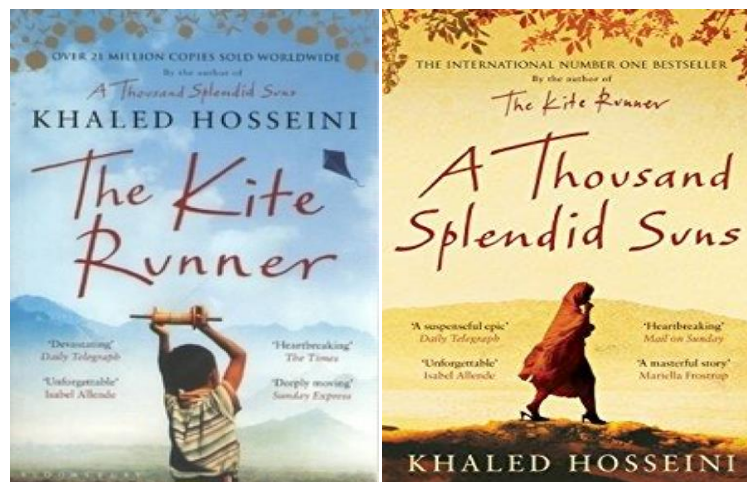
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## Abstract

Dominance has always been a part of human society. Since the dawn of human kind to the present day, one group always dominated the other. This dominance has been carried out through using different mechanisms. Literature is always a reflection of society and writers have tried to deal with the issues concerning society. It portrayed different kinds of oppression prevailing in society in the name of caste, colour, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality etc. This paper tries to show that the oppression suffered by the subordinates was not only due to the mentality of the dominants but also because of their own acceptance of it.

**Keywords:** Stereotype, Legitimising Myth, Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, Dominants, Subordinates.



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*The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Khaled Hosseini is one of the leading Afghan diasporic writers. His works are deeply rooted in Afghanistan. Hosseini's works *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* focuses on the dominance prevailed in Afghan society in two different forms. The oppression is carried out in the name of ethnicity and gender differences. The worst part of this oppression is that it is carried out not only with the participation of the dominants but the subordinates also took part in their own oppression. They are affected by certain common beliefs, stereotypes or religion which are used by the dominants to legitimize their action; known as the legitimising myths. This has been mentioned by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto in their theory of social dominance. *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reflect on this submissive attitude of the subordinates.

### ***The Kite Runner***

Afghanistan being a multi-ethnic country had intergroup conflicts between different ethnic groups. Pashtuns being the majority in Afghanistan always dominated the Hazaras who remained as a minority in the country. *The Kite Runner* story of two friends who are actually half-brothers unveil these conflicts between Pashtuns and Hazaras. The Hazaras in the novel is represented by Hassan and his family. Hassan is the embodiment of self-sacrifice. This attitude has urged to his subordination by the dominant people in the society.

Hassan has been portrayed by Hosseini as the most loyal and obedient servant of Amir, the Pashtun in the novel. He has been carrying a subordinate attitude in him since his childhood and it continues till the end of his life. As children Amir and Hassan indulged in mischievous actions on the demand of Amir, but Hassan never accused Amir when he was caught by his father Ali. He was always trying to protect Amir.

On the other hand, Amir was not even ready to acknowledge Hassan as his friend in front of others. Amir when questioned by Assef for keeping a Hazara as his friend openly denies it. "But he is not my friend! ..... He is my servant" (38). Though Hassan had heard this, it doesn't change his loyalty towards Amir. He still serves Amir in every possible way he can and even threatens Assef with his slingshot in order to protect Amir from him. It should be noted that in all situations Hassan was aware of his position in the society. Even when he is confronted by Assef, he just says "Please leave us alone, Agha" (41). Agha is a word which is

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used to respect. Finally, Hassan raises his voice, not for himself but for Hassan. When Hassan was speaking against Amir he was completely aware of the fact that by this he will make Assef all the more harmful for him. It is this incident that later leads to Hassan's rape.

On the day of the kite tournament Hassan was trying to win the kite for Amir. Though it was an easy task for him, as there was no one else who could win him he had to face many difficulties. When he goes to get the kite, he was encountered by Assef and his friends demanding the kite from him. But Hassan's loyalty doesn't allow him to give it to Assef and this leads to Hassan's rape. Even during the rape, he doesn't show any kind of resistance. Amir who witnessed this incident notes that what marked his face was not resistance but a calm resignation. "Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb" (71). Later when Amir asks Hassan to hit him with a pomegranate fruit, instead of hitting Amir Hassan hits it upon his own head. This attitude was carried by him throughout his life. His death was also result of this. When the Taliban moved into Amir's house and asked Hassan to leave, he was not ready and it costs him his life. Hassan was not ready to leave the house as he was keeping it safe for Amir. This was his final way of submission that took his life away.

Perhaps it was his father Ali who gave Hassan this subordinate attitude because, Ali as a person was much like Hassan. Throughout his life he was living with a sense of his position in the society or the dominants have been able to fix a sense of subordination in the subordinates mind. Ali has been a man who didn't even get the support of his wife. She like others always ridiculed him for his physical deformities and finally cheats him by committing adultery. Ali who knew that he was a sterile, accept and treat Hassan as his own son who was in reality Baba's son. He never questioned Baba and lived like a most obedient servant. Sanaubar, Hassan's mother who left Hassan and Ali just after her pregnancy becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. She was trying to fit into the negative stereotypes created for the Hazaras by the society. Both Sanaubar and Ali was showing a kind of self-debilitating attitude.

Hosseini depicts one more Hazara family in his novel. It is a Hazara girl who was forced to leave her native place as she loved Rahim Khan, a Pashtun. Here also it is seen that the dominant suppressing the subordinate. Here the discrimination is not only in the form of

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ethnicity but her status as a woman also makes her less privileged. Rahim Khan had to suffer little as he was a Pashtun and also because he was a male.

### *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

This gender system that always protected the men is portrayed by Hosseini also in his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Hosseini was concerned about the issues faced by Afghan women because he lived in Afghanistan when women enjoyed more freedom. At a time when they were able to work and attend schools. But when Hosseini visited Afghanistan after the publication of his first novel *The Kite Runner*, their situation had changed. They were destined to live behind the veils. It might be this that prompted Hosseini to write about women in Afghanistan

Hosseini's main character Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has been enduring the effects of this gender system since her childhood. She was a victim of the patriarchy which always protected the interest of men. She has been the child of a rich man out of wedlock. But when his family came to know about this they just threw her mother Nana out. Nana says "you know what he told his wives by way of defense? That I forced myself upon him. That it was my fault" (7). Despite all these injustices towards her it is seen that Nana trying to be very modest in her behaviour when Jalil was around who otherwise resented him and doesn't even care about her appearance. Here, women become a cultural construct. She is trying to live according to the standards set for her by the society and lives in accordance with it. She doesn't allow Mariam to attend school and wants her daughter to learn only one lesson in life and it is 'endurance'.

Mariam like her mother endures all the bitterness in her life without protesting. She marries Rasheed much against her will, but in course of time starts accepting him. Here Mariam had to accept her marriage as fixing a women's marriage was the right of a male patriarch in Afghan society. When Mariam reaches Rasheed's house, he asks her to behave like a wife seeing her indifference towards him. The next day onwards Mariam starts doing the house hold works. For her it was what a woman was supposed to do. It has been fixed in her mind that as a woman it was her duty, or it was her only duty. She was also aware of her sexual duties. She justifies and supports his each and every action. When Mariam finds

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Rasheed watching magazines which contained naked photographs of women she supports it as men's need. It was Rasheed who earlier told her to cover her face and that he doesn't like men who allow their wives to uncover their face in front of other men. Mariam feels it as Rasheed's over protectiveness. During the years Mariam accepts Rasheed's beatings also in the same way and never protests. "Over the years Mariam had learned to harden herself against his scorn and reproach" (234). Mariam also accepts Laila, his second wife. It is her other way of acceptance and submission. The Afghan society also gave her no other chance as polygamy was a very common practice in Afghan society because Muslim religion allowed men to marry up to their choice.

It can be seen that the stereotypes created by the dominants are also accepted by the subordinates, and they are living according to these images. It is Laila's mother speaking of a girls' reputation, who says "He's a boy, you see, and, as such, what does he care about reputation? But you? The reputation of a girl, especially one as pretty as you, is a delicate thing, Laila. Like a mynah bird in your hands. Slacken your grip and away it flies" (160). These kinds of beliefs were not only held by men but by women as well. Nana's teachings of Mariam and Laila's mother's attitude also show that they had accepted these kinds of beliefs and supported their own subordination. Laila like Mariam accepts her oppression and like Mariam once she also feels uncomfortable in the burqa but soon accepts it. The holy Quran advised women to cover their head. Though Laila protests at times, finally she also submits. When Rasheed beats Mariam for Laila refusing to have sex with him, Laila agrees to his demands. On Rasheed's demands Laila admits her daughter Aziza in an orphanage. Though Laila also shows some kind of resistance, partially she is also afflicted with a subordinate attitude.

In different kinds of hierarchies there always exist one dominant and a subordinate group. Here Hosseini presents two hierarchies one on the basis of ethnicity and the other on the basis of gender. Though it is two different kinds of dominance, what constitutes both is the active participation of the subordinates in their own subordination. The domination is carried through some kind of legitimizing myth. The subordinates accept this legitimising myths and become self-fulfilling prophecies by fitting into the common stereotypes created

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for them by the society. In the two novels Hosseini has tried to show that the dominance exists in a society partially due one's submission to it.

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