

Gendered wounds: Reading Sacrifice in Select works of Khaled Hosseini

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Abstract

Sacrifice commonly perceived as noble is portrayed very differently for men and women in Hosseini's fiction. Exploring the theme of gendered sacrifice in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) through the lens of Kandiyoti's *Patriarchal Bargain* (1988). We argue that sacrifice is not a neutral or universal act; it is deeply gendered, socially coded, and unequally valorized. While male characters often choose sacrifice to reclaim honor or seek redemption, women are frequently compelled to surrender personal freedom, dreams, and even their lives to fulfill imposed roles of obedience, motherhood, and endurance. The study highlights how Hosseini uses war narratives to critique cultural double standards by giving voice to the silenced struggles of women while portraying evolving male identities. Through close textual analysis and comparative insights, this paper also reflects on *false consciousness* that war, generational trauma and patriarchal expectations impose on both men and women. Women often bear the burden of silent endurance and sacrificing personal dreams for family and societal duty while men grapple with the pressure to conform to ideals of strength, redemption, and honor even at the cost of personal healing. Hosseini portrays both forms of suffering with deep empathy revealing how conflict fractures identities and reshapes relationships in profoundly human ways. These narratives are set against the backdrop of a war torn Afghanistan and expose how gendered roles shape sacrifice differently yet bind all in a shared experience of loss, longing, and quiet resistance.

Keywords: afghan literature, false consciousness, Khaled Hosseini, patriarchal bargain, sacrifice

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's novels *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) explore deeply personal stories set against the turbulent history of Afghanistan. A recurring thread linking these three works is the theme of sacrifice, the acts of self-giving or suffering that characters undertake for the sake of others. According to Vescei, "Etymologically it comes from the Latin term *sacrificium*, made up by the two words: *sacrum* and *facere* meaning 'doing something sacred'. This amounts to say that it is an Action involving the realm of Sacrality" (Vescei 177).

On close reading, it is observed that these sacrifices are **gendered**. As Weiss puts sacrifice, "A sacrifice, no matter how much virtue it reveals and how much good it brings about, is always to be regretted. It involves the loss of value. To justify it, to make it plausible, it must be shown to be directed towards the bringing about of equal or greater values else-where" (Weiss 81). There is a pattern in how sacrifices are shaped by the gender roles, value they bring and expectations imposed by a patriarchal Afghan society. A feminist literary

theoretical approach provides a useful lens for examining how Hosseini portrays the sacrifices of men and women differently and to what effect. Across Hosseini's oeuvre, male and female characters both make profound sacrifices but the nature, context, and consequences of their self-denial or heroism often diverge along gender lines. Men's sacrifices frequently intersect with themes of honor, redemption, and the protection of family, whereas women's sacrifices are depicted as ingrained in the fabric of daily life under patriarchy. Acts of enduring hardship, surrendering personal dreams, and even risking life itself, all conditioned by societal expectations of female selflessness. By comparing and contrasting the representation of sacrifice by male and female characters in *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*, this paper argues that Hosseini's fiction not only illuminates the differing burdens placed on men and women but also implicitly critiques the patriarchal norms that demand and valorize these gendered sacrifices.

Feminist theory foregrounds the ways in which cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity shape individuals' experiences and how literature can reinforce or resist these ideals. In developing this argument, the paper uses Kandiyoti's 'Patriarchal Bargain' (1988) to interrogate how gender roles are constructed and challenged in the texts. According to her, "the term bargain commonly denotes a deal between more or less equal participants, so it does not accurately apply to my usage, which clearly indicates an asymmetrical exchange. However, women as a rule bargain from a weaker position." (Kandiyoti 286)

In Hosseini's novels, characters are constrained by traditional Afghan gender norms which states that men are expected to be providers, protectors, and head of family affairs while women are expected to be obedient, chaste, and devoted to their family's needs. These norms create distinct arenas for sacrifice. Patriarchal societies often idealize the self-sacrificing woman, "women in areas of classic patriarchy often adhere as far and as long as they possibly can to rules that result in the unfailing devaluation of their labor. The cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination" (Kandiyoti 280). The mother, like Laila, who endures endless hardship for her children or the wife, like Mariam Jo, who forfeits personal liberty for her husband's sake while simultaneously granting men more agency to choose heroic or public forms of sacrifice. The most authentic part of Hosseini's works is that he portrays both of these traditional expectations and gives voice to the often-unseen heroism of women's endurance.

Each text will be analyzed in turn beginning from *The Kite Runner*, then *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and at last *And the Mountains Echoed* with attention to how characters of different genders navigate the demands of sacrifice. Following these individual analyses, a comparative discussion will synthesize insights across the novels highlighting Hosseini's evolving engagement with gender and sacrifice. In doing so, the paper aims to demonstrate that Hosseini's rich storytelling not only evokes empathy for individual characters, but also offers a critique of the cultural narratives that celebrate or silently expect acts of sacrifice especially from women. The result is a body of fiction that, while grounded in specific Afghan contexts speaks to universal questions about gender and sacrifice.

The Archetype of Sacrifice in Patriarchal Bargain

Before delving into the novels, it is important to outline the feminist theoretical framework guiding this analysis. In many cultures, including the traditional Afghan society portrayed by Hosseini, women have historically been idealized as self-sacrificing nurturers. The notion of the "angel in the house," a term originating in Victorian England from Virginia Woolf's

lecture on "Professions for Women," encapsulates a widespread patriarchal ideal of the perfect woman who is pure, gentle, and above all devoted to others often to the point of sacrificing her own desires and well-being. While this ideal was formulated in a different context, its essence resonates in Hosseini's Afghanistan where a "good woman" is expected to endure and do **sacrifice** by being an obedient daughter, a faithful wife, a doting mother, even if it means surrendering her personal happiness. Feminist critics have long pointed out how such expectations serve to constrain women's lives and justify their oppression by framing their suffering as honorable or necessary.

Patriarchal societies also script roles for men, valuing traits like courage, intelligence and strength in the public sphere. Men in literature are often cast as heroes whose sacrifices on the battlefield, in defending family honor, or in providing for the family are celebrated and rewarded. However, the flip side is that men are discouraged from showing vulnerability, like doing so would be seen as unmanly. In Afghan culture, concepts like *nang* and *namoos* (honor and pride) particularly govern male behavior; a man is expected to protect his family's honor even at great personal cost. Meanwhile women's honor is largely equated with sexual purity and loyalty, placing the burden on women to sacrifice personal freedom to uphold family honor. These gendered expectations form a kind of social contract or what feminist sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti termed as "patriarchal bargain" where women comply with subservient roles and men promise protection and provision, "These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression." (Kandiyoti 275)

Similar to the lines of Deniz's objective, "My aim is to highlight a continuum ranging from less corporate forms of householding, involving the relative autonomy of mother-child units evidenced in sub-Saharan polygyny, to the more corporate male-headed entities prevalent in the regions identified by Caldwell (1978) as the "patriarchal belt." (Kandiyoti 275). The objective of this paper is to analyze how female and male characters internalize or resist their socially assigned roles when confronted with situations that demand sacrifice. Do the novels simply portray women suffering in silence and men performing gallant deeds? Or do they complicate these archetypes by giving women a voice? The Hosseini's storytelling while empathetic to all his characters progressively shifts focus toward exposing the inequities women face. *The Kite Runner* primarily follows a male protagonist and explores his guilt and atonement with women mostly at the periphery bound by social convention, given as much space and importance in the text as much they are given in real life. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by contrast centers Afghan women and forces the reader to confront a world where female sacrifice is often demanded and devalued in equal measure. *And the Mountains Echoed* expands to multiple characters and generations showing men and women making hard sacrifices but still underlining how gender can dictate who gets to choose sacrifice and who is forced into it.

With this framework in mind, we now turn to *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini's first novel, to examine how sacrifice is portrayed in a story of fathers, sons, and friends, and to discern what role gender plays in that portrayal.

Masculinity and Sacrifice in *The Kite Runner*

Published in 2003, *The Kite Runner* is often hailed as a tale of friendship, betrayal, and redemption. The story follows *Amir*, a privileged Pashtun boy in 1970s Kabul and his closest

companion *Hassan* who is the Hazara servant's son. On the surface, the novel might seem primarily about ethnicity, *Pashtun vs. Hazara* and social class of Afghanistan and also about personal guilt. However, underlying these themes are traditional gender norms that shape the characters' actions and sense of honor. While *The Kite Runner* foregrounds relationships among men like father-son and boyhood friends. It subtly illuminates how Afghan gender expectations influence who sacrifices what and why. In this novel, male characters occupy most of the narrative space and perform the most visible acts of sacrifice whereas female characters though less prominent exemplify a quieter form of sacrifice constrained by societal norms.

In Afghan culture as depicted in *The Kite Runner*, masculinity is closely tied to ideals of honor, courage, and the ability to protect and provide. *Baba*, *Amir's* father, embodies this traditional masculinity. A physically imposing and principled man, *Baba* sets a high bar for honorable behavior. One striking example is recounted during *Amir* and *Baba's* harrowing escape from Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. When a Russian guard at a checkpoint threatens to violate an Afghan woman refugee, *Baba* intervenes at great personal risk refusing to stand by and allow such an atrocity. He puts himself in the line of fire to defend a stranger's honor, an act of sacrifice that could have cost him his life (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 107). *Amir* recalls how *Baba* boldly told the Russian soldier that he would take a bullet before allowing the attack, effectively declaring that some principles like protecting a woman's dignity are worth dying for. This moment, though brief, highlights a culturally specific form of male sacrifice. *Baba* behaves as a **chivalric protector**, adhering to a code that values a man's duty to safeguard women especially since the threatened woman was essentially under his convoy's protection as a fellow refugee. In doing so *Baba* contrasts sharply with his meek and bookish son *Amir*. *Amir* witnesses his father's bravery and is awed and ashamed. He realizes that the kind of courage *Baba* showed is what is expected of Afghan men yet he himself has failed a similar test miserably with *Hassan*. Earlier in the novel, the pivotal event that drives *Amir's* guilt is his **failure to sacrifice** his own safety to protect *Hassan* from a brutal assault. When *Hassan* is cornered by the bully Assef and is assaulted in an alley, *Amir* hides and watches paralyzed by fear. In that moment, *Amir* does not act according to the masculine code of honor that *Baba* lives by. He does not come to his friend's defence, even though *Hassan* had moments before bravely run down to fetch a kite for him proclaiming, "For you, a thousand times over!" (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 67).

As the narrative progresses, *Amir* gets his chance at redemption only as an adult, when he returns to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan to rescue *Hassan's* young son, *Sohrab*. *Amir's* willingness to face violence now when he could have safely stayed in America signifies his transformation. He consciously chooses to *sacrifice* his physical well-being and potentially his life out of loyalty and responsibility to *Hassan's* memory and to the innocent *Sohrab*. In a brutal showdown, *Amir* is pummeled by Assef. With each blow, he feels a paradoxical sense of relief and healing as if paying the debt of guilt he owed. The scene is visceral in showing a **male redemption arc through sacrifice**. *Amir's* suffering is portrayed as cleansing and necessary for his moral rebirth.

Sacrifice thus is tightly interwoven with masculinity in *The Kite Runner*. To be a good man, in the eyes of the narrative, ultimately means to be willing to lay down one's life or comfort for others. Men who do so like *Baba*, *Hassan*, and eventually *Amir* are idealized.

Female Characters and the Silence of Sacrifice in *The Kite Runner*

While *The Kite Runner* is dominated by male relationships, it does include female characters whose experiences reflect the gender norms of Afghan society and who illustrate a different side of sacrifice. These women do not get the spotlight or the first-person voice that *Amir* has but their lives are nonetheless marked by **sacrifices expected of them** often taken for granted by the men around them. “For the generation of women caught in between, this transformation may represent genuine personal tragedy, since they have paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal bargain, but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits” (Kandiyoti 282). One such figure is *Sanaubar*, *Hassan*’s mother. Although mostly absent from the narrative because she left *Hassan* as an infant and is scorned for it, *Sanaubar* later returns to Kabul seeking redemption. In her youth, *Sanaubar* rebelled against the sacrificial role of motherhood, abandoning her family which is an act that made her infamous. Years later she comes back physically scarred and devotes herself to caring for her grandson *Sohrab*, as a way of making amends to *Hassan*. *Sanaubar*’s trajectory from a “temptress” figure who shirked maternal duty to a repentant grandmother who spends her final years in service to the family she once rejected is a commentary on how unforgiving society is toward women who accept only the self-sacrificing mother archetype. While men like *Baba* can father a child (*Hassan*) out of wedlock and keep it secret with little repercussion, a woman like *Sanaubar* who leaves her child is castigated. In the end, *Sanaubar* finds a place in the familial fold only by sacrificing her remaining years to nurture *Sohrab*, thus conforming at last to the ideal of the devoted, self-effacing mother.

Another prominent female character is Soraya, the young Afghan woman whom *Amir* marries in California. Soraya’s story, though a sub-plot, pointedly highlights the **double standards** for sacrifice and honor between men and women. She bitterly notes how differently Afghan society treats sons and daughters. A man’s transgressions are often overlooked, even swaggered about while a woman’s slightest deviation from chastity or obedience brands her forever. “Their sons go out to nightclubs looking for *meat* and get to boast about it,” Soraya says in essence, “while their daughters must hide, reputations tarnished by the merest whisper of scandal.” Her father, an upstanding yet rigid former General, embodies these double standards. He is “*obsessed with honor and society’s impression*” (Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* 164). For example, Soraya’s mother, Jamila, is an accomplished singer, but General Taheri forbids her from singing in public, viewing it as improper for an Afghan woman. Thus, Khala Jamila sacrifices her passion and public voice to conform to her husband’s idea of propriety. She performs a quiet daily sacrifice of joy and self-expression that is simply expected of a wife.

Amir reflects on how unfair it is that **society grants men second chances readily while women are marked forever**. *Amir*’s empathy for Soraya’s plight is an instance of Hosseini giving voice to a feminist critique. Through Soraya’s story, the novel implicitly condemns the way Afghan culture asks women to sacrifice their freedom and then punishes them harshly if they transgress, whereas men’s misdeeds even sexual ones, rarely lead to the same level of exclusion.

Gender and Sacrifice in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

A Thousand Splendid Suns follows two Afghan women, *Mariam* and *Laila*, whose lives become intertwined against the backdrop of war, oppression, and ever-shifting political regimes. Grounded in a conscious feminist perspective, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* examines how women navigate a world that routinely demands their submission and sacrifice. In this novel, gender roles and expectations are not just background elements, they are the very engine of the plot and the source of its most harrowing conflicts. Hosseini portrays the

sacrifices of women as daughters, wives, and mothers with empathy and outrage illuminating the systematic injustices that force these sacrifices upon them. At the same time, the novel also depicts a few key male figures like fathers, a husband, a lover whose actions call attention to different models of masculinity ranging from compassionate to tyrannical. By comparing the sacrifices made by its female protagonists with those made (or not made) by the men in their lives, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* offers a rich exploration of gendered sacrifice and pointedly critiques the patriarchal culture that makes such sacrifice the central fate of women.

“Like a Compass Needle... a Man’s Accusing Finger Always Finds a Woman” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 7).

One of the most quoted lines from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* comes early in the novel, spoken by *Mariam’s* mother *Nana* to her young daughter. This bitter maxim is borne of *Nana’s* own life of pain. *Nana’s* words encapsulate the novel’s central theme of scapegoating of women for misfortunes and sins in a patriarchal society. From the outset, Hosseini sets the stage for examining how women are blamed, silenced, and made to carry burdens of shame and honor that should not be theirs alone. This pointing out of finger on women creates an atmosphere in which sacrifice is a woman’s constant companion. She will always be expected to yield, to apologize, to absorb anger or violence, simply because she is female. *Mariam* internalizes this lesson over the course of her life, even as she quietly resists its fatalism through acts of love and conscience that eventually break the cycle *Nana* described.

The novel’s plot forces its two heroines, *Mariam* and *Laila*, into situations of extreme sacrifice. *Mariam*, born an illegitimate child (*harami*), first sacrifices her childhood hopes and illusions. As a little girl, she idolizes her father *Jalil* but *Jalil’s* legitimate family swiftly shuffles *Mariam* into an unwanted marriage with a much older man, *Rasheed*. *Mariam’s* consent is not truly sought and her feelings are irrelevant. This arrangement itself is a **sacrifice of *Mariam’s* autonomy and youth**, orchestrated by the men in her life one is her father and the other is her suitor for their convenience and reputation. *Jalil* sacrifices his daughter’s happiness to preserve his own social standing which is a stark example of how a man’s unwillingness to sacrifice his public honor results in a devastating forced sacrifice for a woman. *Mariam* enters the marriage resigned as countless young brides in patriarchal societies have done, surrendering personal freedom for the promise of shelter and social acceptance. But according to Kandiyoti, “Among the propertyless and the dispossessed, the necessity of every household member's contribution to survival turns men's economic protection of women into a myth” (Kandiyoti 282).

Life with *Rasheed* in Kabul soon teaches *Mariam* the full meaning of *Nana’s* words. *Rasheed* is initially civil to *Mariam* but his demeanor changes when *Mariam* fails to bear him a child. Here, the **gendered expectation** is clear that *Rasheed* desires a son to validate his manhood and carry on his name, and *Mariam’s* worth in his eyes is largely as a womb. “Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation.” (Kandiyoti 279)

In one chilling scene, after *Mariam* cooks a meal that *Rasheed* finds subpar, he forces pebbles into her mouth and makes her chew them, breaking her teeth, a grotesque punishment that exemplifies the cruelty of a patriarchal despot in the household. This is domestic tyranny where *Rasheed* expects absolute obedience and bears no sacrifice or inconvenience himself. Instead, he inflicts all suffering on his wife. “The observance of restrictive practices is such a crucial element in the reproduction of family status that women will resist breaking the rules,

even if observing them produces economic hardship” (Kandiyoti 280). *Mariam*’s daily existence becomes an act of survival and endurance. **Endurance as sacrifice** much like *Nana* had predicted. She sacrifices her dignity piece by piece to appease her husband’s volatile temper, because the alternative might be even worse, leading to violence. *Mariam*’s life with *Rasheed* is a long testament to **female suffering** but also to resilience. Despite years of hardship, *Mariam* retains a core of empathy and capacity for love that eventually finds its purpose when *Laila* enters their lives.

The novel’s second protagonist *Laila* is of a younger generation than *Mariam* and grows up in very different circumstances. Suddenly orphaned and gravely injured, fifteen-year-old *Laila* is rescued from the rubble by *Rasheed* and *Mariam*, now her neighbours. Here fate intervenes intertwining *Laila*’s path with *Mariam*’s. *Rasheed* being opportunistic decides to take the beautiful young *Laila* as a second wife. *Laila* for her part makes a **shrewd and heartbreaking sacrifice**. She consents to marry *Rasheed*, a man over twice her age and whom she knows to be abusive from overhearing neighbourhood gossip. “The young bride enters her husband’s household as an effectively dispossessed individual who can establish her place in the patriline only by producing male offspring (Kandiyoti 279).” Thus, *Laila* **sacrifices her youthful dream of romantic love and a marriage of choice** primarily to protect her baby, whom *Rasheed* will assume is his. She becomes the “stranger bride” like *Mariam* Jo (Kandiyoti 279). Stranger bride is a term used by Kandiyoti to emphasise the unawareness of the brides towards their husband and in-laws when they get into a marriage. The brides are complete stranger to their ways of living thus termed as a stranger bride. Khaleed, in his novels has portrayed most of the women as stranger brides.

Mariam’s execution also starkly illustrates how the patriarchal system devours those women who dare to defy it. Despite *Rasheed*’s long record of brutality, it is *Mariam* who is punished by law, executed by the state for the crime of protecting a woman and children from domestic violence. She makes this choice deliberately “But how can an act be praiseworthy if it involves the loss of something as precious as a human life?” asks Weiss (Weiss 76). This outcome resonates with *Nana*’s early warning that the accusing fingers of men and the male dominated institutions have all pointed at *Mariam*, blaming her for a crime where she was arguably the most morally justified. One can argue that if she was a military person and had done the same action, she would have been appreciated rather than being punished for killing a man trying to murder his wife. Carbonell states that the sacrifices made by military personnel differ from traditional self-sacrifice as they involve deeper transformations in society that cannot be solely measured in terms of wellbeing of one person (Carbonell p 1, 2, 5). *Mariam*’s fate represents the countless real women who are incarcerated or killed for defending themselves against abusive husbands. A grim commentary on the legal and social framework that treats women’s lives as expendable. Hosseini by giving *Mariam*’s inner thoughts at the end a tone of dignity and transcendence invites the reader to see *Mariam* not as a victim, but as a *heroine* whose sacrifice, though it cost her life ensured a better future for the next generation.

The cost of patriarchy on male characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

On the opposite end of women stand men like *Rasheed* and *Tariq*, *Laila*’s childhood sweetheart and eventual true husband. *Tariq*, though also a product of Afghan society demonstrates a different masculinity. He is protective but respectful and most importantly willing to sacrifice *for Laila* rather than demand sacrifice *from* her. As a boy, *Tariq* heroically defended *Laila* from bullies and as a teenager, he made love with her tenderly without the harsh judgment that society would have for her and as a man, he survives refugee life losing a

leg in the war, which in itself is a sacrifice and a mark of suffering. After *Mariam's* sacrifice and *Rasheed's* death, *Tariq* becomes *Laila's* second chance at love and a decent life. He readily accepts *Aziza*, another man's daughter as his own without knowing the truth that she is his own. A significant act in patriarchal cultures where raising another man's child is not honourable. *Tariq's* behaviour models a **companionate masculinity** that stands in stark relief against *Rasheed's* tyrannical version. He is willing to step back and let *Laila* pursue her calling which is a quiet sacrifice of male ego. Women like *Mariam* and *Laila* are driven to extraordinary lengths enduring abuse, giving up personal freedom, and even laying down their lives which is largely because the patriarchal structure leaves them with no other choice. The men in their lives illustrate the spectrum of how patriarchy can be perpetuated or rejected. The novel's emotional power and moral outrage lie in showing that the burdens placed on women are unjust and immense. As the book portrays "patriarchal despotism" where women are wholly dependent on male favour and bearing a male child is their only ticket to respect. "Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim sons' primary allegiance. Young women have an interest in circumventing and possibly evading their mother-in-law's control (Kandiyoti 279)".

The Sacrifice of Pari in *And the Mountains Echoed*

In *And the Mountains Echoed* the theme of gendered sacrifice is more diffuse, as the novel's narrative is not confined to one or two protagonists or to a single family. Instead, it pans across various characters, male and female, Afghan and non-Afghan, to examine different forms of sacrifices like parental sacrifice, sibling sacrifice, sacrifice of one's own dreams for another's benefit, and even the absence or failure of sacrifice. The pivotal sacrifice that initiates the narrative is *Saboor's* decision to sell his daughter *Pari*. *Saboor* is a poor labourer in a rural village, struggling to feed his family after the death of his first wife and one of his children (a baby died of cold and hunger one winter). When the opportunity arises for *Pari* to be adopted by a wealthy Kabul couple, *Saboor* agonizingly consents, believing that *Pari* will live a comfortable life and that the substantial sum of money offered will save his other children from starvation. This sacrifice is framed by the folktale *Saboor* tells his children the night before which is a story of a farmer who must give his favourite son to a *div* (demon) to spare the rest of his family from the demon's wrath. In the tale, the *div* later shows the man that the son is living happily in a paradise like garden and gives the father a choice to take the boy back or leave him to his blissful life. The father leaves the boy with a heavy heart for the boy's own good even though it breaks him. *Saboor's* story is a clear parable for his own looming choice and indeed he follows the same path. Giving up his daughter to give her a chance at a better life, while knowing he will carry the pain of that loss forever.

This founding incident reveals much about gender and sacrifice in the familial context. Notably, *Saboor* chooses to sacrifice a daughter, not a son. *Pari's* older brother *Abdullah* is spared. In spite, he suffers the emotional loss of his sister whom he adores with almost parental love. But why *Pari*? On a pragmatic level, a daughter might be seen as *expendable* in a patriarchal setting. Sons in Afghani culture often are valued more as future breadwinners while daughters are sometimes seen as burdens or commodities. However, *Saboor's* motives are not cruel. He genuinely loves *Pari* perhaps even especially so because she is gentle and reminds him of his deceased mother. His calculation is that the *Wahdatis* want a daughter. *Nila* specifically desires a girl to raise and by giving them *Pari*, he is not only securing money but placing *Pari* in a rich household where her prospects far exceed those in the village.

Gender roles facilitate this arrangement because it would have been unlikely for him to give up his son Abdullah in the same manner because a boy in that time and place had perceived duties to his birth family. A girl on the other hand destined to marry out anyway could be *transferred* more easily. Therefore, underlying *Saboor's* sacrifice is a patriarchal logic that daughters belong not truly to their fathers but to whichever family they marry or in this case, are adopted into. Pari's sacrifice being severed from her birth family is decided for her by the men (*Saboor* and *Suleiman Wahdati* who strike the deal).

For the brother left behind, loss of a sister is a wound that never fully heals. Abdullah's entire life becomes oriented around that early sacrifice. He emigrates and eventually opens a restaurant aptly named *Pari's* in California commemorating the sister he lost. In a way, Abdullah's life is a very long sacrifice to memory and longing. He is never quite whole after losing Pari. This dynamic actually highlights a form of sacrifice not heavily gendered. Sibling love transcends this ingrained societal gender bias but it does underline how choices in a patriarchal context like father deciding fate of daughter cascade and cause everyone including the son to suffer quietly. In this way Khaleed moves from a patriarchal setting to gender equality as his novels unfold. *The Kite Runner* has least space for women and equally *The Thousand Splendid Suns* has least space for men. Eventually *And The Mountains Echoed* has equal space for both men and women. But as Gashtili puts it in her paper it is not possible to achieve gender equality as long as the Islamic regime remains in power. The author advocates for the separation of religion and state to enable genuine feminist movements in Iran (Gashtili 136). The situations of women in Iran and Afghanistan are quite close by. As seen in Hosseini's progressing novels that with time Afghanistan adopts to globalisation, specially westernisation which is leading to less gendered sacrifices.

On contrary Mir states in her paper that women may sacrifice their comfort, traditional roles, and sometimes face societal backlash in their pursuit of rights and justice. But the emergence of Islamic feminism is highlighted as a means for women to reconcile their faith with their aspirations for equality suggesting that change is possible within an Islamic framework (Mir-Hosseini p 1). It is undeniable that the women in Hosseini's work are also Islamic women and the goal of gender equality cannot be achieved without Islamic feminism.

Many years later the siblings are reunited but cruelly Abdullah by then suffers from Alzheimer's and cannot recognize Pari. This situation is akin to what Hosseini says early in the novel "Nothing good came free. Even love. You paid for all things. And if you were poor, suffering was your currency" (Khaleed *And The Mountains Echoed* 27). This twist of fate emphasizes an ongoing theme highlighting that sacrifices mostly do not result in neat or just outcomes. Pari grows up in France and only learns of her origins in middle age. She sacrifices something intangible which is her coherent sense of identity because of her forced separation. When she finally discovers the truth she faces the bittersweet reality that the brother who never stopped loving her no longer remembers her. The novel thus shows that even when a sacrifice is made with the best intentions (*Saboor* truly believed he was doing the right thing for Pari and for his other children), the reverberations can include enduring trauma and lost opportunities for love. Gender roles in this situation made *Saboor* to make that choice unilaterally; one wonders, if Pari's mother were alive or if there were more female input, would the decision have been different? The novel leaves that as speculation but it's notable that when Pari later becomes a mother herself she is fiercely attached to her children perhaps an unspoken contrast to how she was given up so easily. "The implications of the patrilineal and patrilocal complex for women not only are remarkably uniform but also entail forms of

control and subordination that cut across cultural and religious boundaries, such as those of Hinduism, Confucianism, and Islam. (Kandiyoti 278)”

And the Mountains Echoed presents other scenarios of gendered sacrifice beyond this central storyline. One of the most poignant subplots involves Pari’s adoptive mother Nila Wahdati, and *Nabi* who is Pari’s uncle (Parwana’s brother) and the chauffeur of the Wahdati household. *Nabi* is the one who initially arranged Pari’s adoption acting on the request of his employer Suleiman Wahdati who secretly loves *Nabi* complicating things further. *Nabi*, in facilitating the transfer of Pari becomes wracked with guilt and a sense of responsibility. He ends up sacrificing his own life aspirations to care for Suleiman Wahdati after Nila leaves. She sacrifices her marriage walking away from her husband and takes young Pari to Paris. In Paris Nila raises Pari but struggles with depression, alcoholism, and the challenge of being a single mother far from home. One could argue Nila sacrificed the comfort and respectability of Kabul society for her personal freedom and artistic life but it is an ambiguous freedom, fraught with loneliness and eventual suicide. Her story while not directly about sacrificing for others, showcases a woman who refuses to sacrifice *herself* to a suffocating domestic role and the heavy cost she pays for that refusal. Nila’s abandonment of her husband and Afghanistan contrasts with *Mariam* and *Laila*’s choices in the earlier novel. Nila chooses self-fulfillment over familial duty, a typically “unfeminine” choice in that context and her fate is ultimately tragic. This suggests that the world was not kind to women who put themselves first and refused sacrifice themselves.

Parwana and Masooma’s stories offer another lens on female sacrifice. Parwana, *Saboor*’s second wife and *Nabi*’s sister has her own dark secret. As a young woman, driven by jealousy she caused the accident that left her beautiful twin sister Masooma paralyzed for life. Guilt-ridden Parwana then sacrifices her own prospects to care for Masooma for many years, bathing her, feeding her, tending to her every need. Masooma literally loses her mobility and future and Parwana loses her freedom shackled by guilt and duty. This tale of two sisters is like a microcosm of the angel and witch dichotomy. The “plain” sister commits a sin and becomes the lifelong nurse, the “pretty” sister becomes helpless and saintly. It’s a powerful exploration of how one impulsive act of vengeance imposes a lifelong moral burden.

In terms of gender, this story is interesting because it’s an intimate female sphere. No man forces Parwana to care for Masooma; it is an internally motivated sacrifice. Parwana could have left Masooma at any time but her own conscience and likely societal expectation that a sister must not abandon her twin kept her in that servitude until Masooma herself urges Parwana to leave and marry *Saboor*.

Masooma essentially gives up her own will to live to free Parwana as it is implied that Masooma euthanizes herself with an overdose or at least wills herself to die after sending Parwana away. Thus, one sister sacrifices her life so that the other might not waste hers entirely. Though attempted suicide, Masooma emerges as epitome of Self-sacrifice. According to Paul Weiss, “Suicide is the expression of weakness, self-sacrifice of strength. The one is selfish, the other not. One can be excused perhaps, but never praised; the other can be regretted perhaps, but never blamed” (Weiss 80). Parwana’s life is one of continual subjugation of her own desires. First to her sister’s care then to her husband’s household. She’s not portrayed as a particularly affectionate or heroic figure because she is complex with resentments and regrets but she exemplifies how women are often placed in positions of caretaker and have to erase themselves in the service of others’ needs.

Conclusion

“Patriarchal bargains do not merely inform women's rational choices but also shape the more unconscious aspects of their gendered subjectivity, since they permeate the context of their early socialization, as well as their adult cultural milieu (Kandiyoti 1987a. 1987b)” (Kandiyoti 285). Khaled Hosseini's three novels together compose a profound meditation on sacrifice. Who gives, who receives, and at what cost? In *The Kite Runner*, we witnessed how a man's journey to redemption is paved by acts of sacrifice that allow him to reclaim honor and love. Even women orbit that journey contributing quiet sacrifices of their own in a male-centric world. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* then shifted the focus squarely onto the lives of women. Unflinchingly portraying a society in which women's very existence demands sacrifice of freedom, of physical autonomy, of dreams and at the same time showing the incredible courage and solidarity women muster to transform those imposed sacrifices into something meaningful and even revolutionary. Finally, *And the Mountains Echoed* broadened the scope suggesting that the echoes of sacrifice ripple through generations and across borders binding together the fates of men and women in unexpected ways.

In Hosseini's world we do not see women revolting or protesting at any level. Instead, we observe silent sacrifices until the limit crosses the threshold of endurance. But Hosseini ensures that the heroines are not invisible. “Their passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain- protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety (Kandiyoti 283).” *Mariam*, *Laila*, and other females emerge as the emotional anchors of their respective novels. Their sacrifices do not go in vain because they pave the way for others' survival and hope. Conversely, masculinity in these novels is a more fluid construct. Some male characters like *Baba*, *Hassan*, *Tariq*, or *Nabi* exemplify a positive masculinity that involves protection, gentleness, and willingness to sacrifice ego or comfort for loved ones whereas others like *Rasheed* abuse their patriarchal power and still some people like *Amir* or *Saboor* struggle somewhere in between, ultimately finding redemption in adopting the selflessness often ascribed to feminine virtue. In this way, Hosseini's work aligns with feminist aims by valorizing traits of empathy and care historically devalued as “feminine” as true markers of strength for all genders.

On one hand, sacrifice is shown as the ultimate expression of love, the ability to put another's needs above one's own, as seen in the unforgettable devotion of characters like *Hassan* and *Mariam*. On the other hand, when the burden of sacrifice is unfairly distributed by gender, it becomes a tool of oppression, as seen in the crushing expectations and violent compulsions placed on women like *Nana*, *Mariam*, and *Laila*. Hosseini does not offer easy solutions to these entrenched issues, but he does offer **hope**. The hope lies in empathy, education, and remembering. Characters like *Laila*, becomes a teacher building the future of a new Afghanistan symbolize the possibility of change, a future where a girl will not have to suffer as her mother did. Because as Kandiyoti says, “Women have very little to gain and a lot to lose by becoming totally dependent on husbands.” (Kandiyoti 277).

Ultimately, through these narratives, Hosseini invites a critique of the patriarchal culture that produces such gendered patterns of sacrifice. The novels collectively suggest that while sacrifice born out of love is noble but a society that systematically expects women to sacrifice limitlessly even their lives requires urgent scrutiny and change. Hosseini's work suggests that while sacrifice may be universal, the goal should be a world where sacrifices are **freely chosen out of love, not coerced by inequality or violence**. In such a world, the heroism of women would no longer require martyrdom, and the strength of men would be measured not by dominance but by their capacity for compassion. *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed* collectively urge us to recognize the quiet sacrifices

made in homes and hearts and to strive for a society that does not take such sacrifice for granted based on gender.

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