

A Thousand Splendid Suns: Rhetorical Vision of Afghan Women

M.A. Thesis

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Chapter One – Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two – Literature review	9
Chapter Three – Research design and methodology.....	40
Chapter Four – Application of fantasy theme analysis	56
Chapter Five – Discussion	91
Chapter Six – Conclusion.....	100
References	105
Appendix A.....	113

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Abstract

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Afghan women suddenly gained high visibility all over the world. Since then, representations of Afghan women in the Western media and notably in the U.S. news media provide a critical concern to scholars. Much of the relevant literature on this topic speaks to the fact that the dominant portrayal of Afghan women in the Western media has shown them as passive victims of war and violence, to be liberated only by the Western military intervention. However, the question remains as to how the popular fictional narratives, as another vivid source of information, represent Afghan women to the Western readers. To address this question, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as a popular novel authored by Khalid Hosseini, an Afghan novelist, was selected. Bormannian fantasy theme analysis of this novel conveys the passivity of women in the context of Afghanistan. The findings reveal that the portrayals of Afghan women in the novel correspond with the images of Afghan women in the Western media. Moreover, an examination of a sample of book reviews of the novel unveils the important contribution of Khalid Hosseini to the Orientalist discourse.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Afghanistan, located in south central Asia, has existed in its present form since the mid-1700s when the tribal factions of the country were united under one leader (Dupree, 1977). The history of Afghanistan is marked by political instability, particularly during the last 30 years of prolonged war, infrastructure collapse, and restrictive political regimes. The situation of women in Afghanistan has been dismal during this period. Their status was undermined during the Soviet occupation and under subsequent regimes; in fact, the violation of Afghan women's human rights is considered to have been at its worst in the early 1990s (Farhoumand, 2005).

Women's rights were further eroded when the Taliban came into power in 1996 (Farhoumand, 2005). Yet the plight of Afghan women was barely covered by the Western mainstream media until the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September, 2001 drew strategic interest toward Afghanistan (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). In the weeks following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, burqa-clad women were immediately featured on the cover of the New York Times, Business Week, Newsweek, Time, and other general interest magazines (Fahmy, 2003). Subsequently, the anonymous veiled women gained high visibility.

Since then, scholars have taken great interest in representations of Afghan women in the Western mass media and notably in the U.S. news media (Ansari, 2008; Cloud, 2004; Droogsma, 2007; Fahmy, 2003; Friedman, 2002; Khan, 2001; Klaus & Kassel, 2005; Kumar, 2008; Macdonald, 2006; Sarikakis, 2002; Schwartz-Dupre, 2010). Many of these scholars agree with media scholars Stabile and Kumar (2005) that Afghan women, portrayed in the Western mass media as oppressed, powerless victims of terrorists who need to be protected, serve as a

passive vehicle for the legitimization of U.S. military involvement. To construct the same argument, Cloud (2004) uncovers how images of Afghan women have functioned to “establish the barbarity of a society in which women are profoundly oppressed” (p. 287). Protection scenario is the term used to describe this sort of argument about protecting women that serve the purpose of justification for the bombing of Afghanistan (Stabile & Kumar, 2005).

The Protection scenario, as Stabile and Kumar (2005) argue, appears to serve as one of the pillars on which the elites sought to sell the war to the U.S. public. However, it is important to note that the discourse of protection used by politicians and the media alike not only serves to erase the enduring struggles of women in Afghanistan during the war as Stabile and Kumar observe, but also denies Afghan women any agency in decision making processes that affect their everyday lives and futures as Cohn and Enloe (2003) reflect.

Likewise, the significance of representations of Afghan women in the mainstream media is accentuated due to the fact that the mass media are seen by many scholars to play a vital role in shaping perceptions of the world (Berger & Luchmann, 1967; Hall, 1997; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). The importance of the issue magnifies when media consumers, as Fishman (1980) remarks, are led to see the world outside first-hand experience through the eyes of the media. Accordingly, rendering Afghan women passive, which provides the grounds for the purpose of imperialist domination, represents them to the Western readers as dejected victims of war rather than as women with agency who struggle to gain empowerment in their own culture.

On the other hand, the history of Afghanistan speaks to the fact that, alongside the oppression imposed by the Taliban and Mujahidin, this country is among the strongest patriarchal societies that begets more restricted, oppressed conditions for women (Moghadam, 1992). However, many scholars disclose how Afghan women fight to survive during the war,

take part in social participation to reclaim their rights, and further their enhancement over the history of Afghanistan (Ellis, 2000; Latifa, 2002; Moser, 1989; Rostami, 2003; Skaine, 2002; Skaine, 2008). To illustrate, since the 1950s, women made up 50 percent of university students, 40 percent of doctors, 70 percent of teachers, and 30 percent of civil servants in Afghanistan. A small number of women even held important political posts and most Afghan women did not wear burqa (Smeal, 2001). Since 1964, women enjoyed the basic rights such as universal suffrage and equal pay. In the early 1990s, a large number of Afghan women participated in the workforce and public life. Yet what the Western readers know about Afghan women is a thin history offered by the mainstream media, which caricaturizes the victimization of Afghan women during the war and largely disregards the courageous struggles of women who, as Latifa (2002) comments, had risked their lives to organise illegal secular schools and produce underground magazines under the very eyes of the Taliban.

However, the news media is not the only outlet that feeds the images of Afghan women to the Western readers. Fictional narratives are another vivid source of information for readers and, in particular, for those who do not have firsthand experience with Afghan women. As Appel and Richter (2007) assert, narrative has an implicit influence on the way people view the world as well as shifting people's worldview. Yet one is left to wonder how popular fictional narratives represent Afghan women to the Western readers who rely on these outlets as the firsthand source of information, and the question remains that weather this sort of mass media device reproduces what the Western news media represents or if it depicts Afghan women differently. To the knowledge of the researcher, there is not sufficient study in this area. Searching the Dissertation Abstracts and Communication data base, the researcher determines that insufficient research in this domain exists that need to be addressed.

Purpose of the Study

To fill this gap in the literature, the researcher chose the popular novel written by an Afghan author abroad to examine and uncover the images of Afghan women. Fantasy theme analysis will be used to illuminate the themes implicit in the construction of women's portrayals in Afghanistan by author Khalid Hosseini in his well-known novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* respectively. The purpose of this project is to discover the rhetorical visions of Afghan women embedded in this novel. This study is an attempt to critically examine the portrayals of Afghan women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and to understand how the images of Afghan women represented in the novel corresponds with what portrayed in the Western news media.

Rationale for the Study

Exploring portrayals of Afghan women figured through this novel is significant for various reasons: first, portraying pictures of Afghan women in the Western media as oppressed, powerless victims of war who need to be protected serve to erase the continuous struggles of Afghan women during 30 years of civil war (Stable & Kumar, 2005). To strengthen the humanitarian justification for the U.S. military intervention, Pae Lynn Schwartz-DuPre (2010) uncovers that the mainstream media has notably highlighted Afghan women's oppression and victimisation, which largely serve to ignore their struggles and courageousness. However, we can explore other popular outlets such as movies, magazines, and fictions to understand if they produce a picture different from what the news media have already reflected.

Second, our understanding about other cultures and nations around the world is shaped through mediated visual information (Mitra, 1999). Although numerous inter-related social factors might contribute to our perceptions of others, media portrayals unquestionably play a

very important role in influencing people's attitudes towards others, especially in the absence of face-to-face interactions with these groups. On this note, the portrayals of women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* encourage the Western readers to determine their perception of Afghan women. In most cases, the Western readers do not experience face-to-face interactions with women in Afghanistan. Hence, popular outlets such as this novel help them shape their image of Afghan women. Third, because novel is primarily an entertainment vehicle reaching a mass market of millions, it may be reasonable to claim that the public draws an image of women in part from popular novels. Therefore, the depiction of Afghan women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* seems to be a worthwhile topic for an academic research. Furthermore, reading, as Ernst Cassirer (1965) argues, is a public act: discussing the novel, reading reviews of the novel, and viewing the film adaptations render books a part of the cultural dialogue by which popular attitudes may be expressed. That could be the reason as to why we cannot undervalue the significance of what readers perceive through popular novels.

To conclude, the work of Khalid Hosseini is significant on account of its high readership among the Western readers, its translation in different languages, and receiving favourable prepublication reviews. To illustrate, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* received favourable prepublication reviews from Kirkus, Publishers Weekly, Library Journal, and Booklist, as well as reaching number 2 on Amazon.com's bestseller list before its release. Besides, Khalid Hosseini is the author of *Kite Runner*, which was an international bestseller, selling more than 12 million copies worldwide (Kakutani, 2007). As a popular work, this novel continues to affect the world's notion about Afghan society and particularly about Afghan women. It turns out to be influential across the world and worthwhile to be closely examined.

Against such a backdrop and with bearing in mind the images of Afghan women figured by the Western mass media, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* will be closely examined with the intention of furthering our understanding of whether their images support the reflections of the Western mass media about the Afghan women as the oppressed, powerless victims of war and terrorists who need to be protected or if they challenge it.

Overview of Thesis

Chapter one: Introduction; this chapter embodies the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the rationale for the study, and the chapter summary.

Chapter two: Literature and Theoretical Framework; this chapter deeply elaborates on women's situation over the history of Afghanistan, the patriarchal culture in Afghanistan, survival strategies and the participation of Afghan women in Afghan society, Afghan media, media construction of reality, and fictional narratives.

Chapter three: Research Design and Methodology; this chapter pertains to the rhetorical critical method used in this study, namely fantasy theme analysis. To uncover the rhetorical vision of Afghan women embedded in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, recurrent dramas will be detected and interpreted regarding the characterization of the key persona, the development of the storyline, and the justification offered for the behaviour of those in the drama.

Chapter Four: Application of fantasy theme analysis; this chapter will apply fantasy theme analysis to identify the fantasy themes and explore the rhetorical vision(s) embedded within *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. To supply more evidence of the existence of the rhetorical vision a range of relevant book reviews selected from an online forum will be examined. Furthermore, the relationship between the fantasy themes in the novel and those within the book reviews will

be discussed to find out how the rhetorical visions emerging within the novel are chained out among the Western readers in this study.

Chapter Five: Discussion; this chapter attempts to realize the ways in which the vision of Afghan women represented by *A Thousand Splendid Suns* corresponds to that reflected by the Western news media.

Chapter Six: Conclusion; this chapter includes the summary of the study, limitations of the research, and recommendations for future studies. Although this study will examine a sample of concerned book reviews to provide more evidence of the existence of the rhetorical vision identified within the novel, it should be noted that the readers' experiencing of the novel may have been biased through exposure to the mediated image of Afghan women. Moreover, the researcher may bear her own cultural background and experience and her bias may to some extent be applied to the analysis. Future researches could extend this study to examinations of other novels and fictions laying emphasis on Afghan women because this type of investigation could determine if the stereotypical image of Afghan women remains dominant in literature. Furthermore, an examination of the reality of women in the context of Afghanistan will be constructive to understand how the real image of Afghan women corresponds with that reflected in the media and literature.

Chapter Summary

In the weeks that followed the attacks on the United States on 11 September, 2001, Afghan women suddenly gained a high visibility all over the world. Much of the relevant literature speaks to the fact that Afghan women, portrayed in the Western news media as oppressed, powerless victims of terrorists, serve as a passive vehicle for legitimization of

military involvement. Although communication scholars have made an effort to uncover the images of Afghan women in the Western news media, the question remains as to how Afghan women are represented through fictional narratives, which plays an important role in constructing perception of the world. By providing background information, discussing the purpose of the study, and exploring its rationale, this chapter outlined how this study attempts to uncover the images of Afghan women portrayed in the well-known novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini. Chapter two will review relevant literature on women's situation over the history of Afghanistan, the patriarchal culture in Afghanistan, survival strategies and the participation of Afghan women in Afghan society, Afghan media, media construction of reality, and fictional narratives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The primary purpose of this study is to examine how Afghan women are portrayed in the well-known Afghan novel, namely *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (Hosseini, 2007). To this end, it is important to provide a brief overview of the general situation of Afghan women in four significant historical periods in which women's situation constantly and significantly changed. Given that the dominant patriarchal culture of Afghanistan plays a vital role in embedding these changes, the present study further examines the patriarchal culture in Afghanistan, particularly based on examination of Moghadam's (1992) essay "Patriarchy and Politics of Gender In Modernizing Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan."

Another portion of this volume is allocated to examining Afghan women's strategies for survival during the historical periods mentioned earlier. In this regard, the present study draws largely upon Skaine's (2002) *The Women of Afghanistan under the Taliban*. Next, the study will detail the history of the Afghan media in different historical periods and will touch on the role of women in the media in Afghanistan. Another chunk of the literature review is allotted to exploring the figure of Afghan women in the Western media. Ultimately, the study approaches the construction of women's image through the media. By reviewing some studies in this area the present study intends to demonstrate how mediated images of women influence perception of readers. The concluding part of this section will examine some studies in fictional narratives with the major focus on novels.

Accordingly, the following seven categories embody the review of literature: women's situation throughout the history of Afghanistan, patriarchal culture in Afghanistan, survival strategies and social participation of Afghan women, Afghan women in the Western media, Afghan media, media construction of reality, and fictional narratives.

Women's Situation throughout the History of Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the process of achieving equal rights for women has been a complicated one. Their conditions depend on where they live. In rural areas, the question of female employment and education has not been an issue. They have always worked on the land and have been provided with a minimal level of education (Skaine, 2002). Apart from having the roles of wives and mothers, they have played an important economic role by covering some aspects of agricultural routine, particularly planting and weeding, animal husbandry, and craft production. In terms of wearing burqas in rural areas, the burqa was seldom worn because it interfered with women's work in fields and with the care of livestock. Instead, wearing burqas has been more common in the southern provinces (Marsden, 1998).

Moreover, Marsden indicates women in traditional societies have had an important symbolic role as the core of society. Protection of women depends on the protection of society, and the honour of society is tied up with the honour of women. The wish to protect women has resulted in *purdah*, which is restricting women's movements so that they have limited contact with men outside family or village community. This has been particularly the case in the Pashtun society. Although the movement of women in the Hazara, Uzbek, and Tajik societies has been circumscribed, it is not to the degree inherent in the Pashtun society¹. Nevertheless, the nomadic society in Afghanistan is exceptional. The nomadic women are inevitably highly mobile and do not face the strict taboos on contact with strangers (Marsden, 1998).

In urban areas, however, there is a different scenario. In the early 20th century, girls were educated; most of the women did not wear burqas; arranged marriages were dominant, yet

¹ Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek are four major ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

love matches were not rare (Skaine, 2002). Reforms of King Amanullah from 1919 to 1929 largely improved the position of women and girls in cities. To illustrate, Marsden (1998) points out banning child marriage, outlawing polygamy among civil servants, and permitting women to discard veils. A growing number of girls in this period benefited from secondary and higher education. In 1953, when Daoud became prime minister, women were encouraged to take part in the government and the workforce. They went into usual service roles like secretaries, nurses, receptionists, and air hostesses. A minority became doctors, lawyers, engineers, and journalists. By the end of 1950s, policies were enacted to allow women to hold greater roles in education and the workforce, to voluntarily remove the veil, and to have a future beyond the walls of their homes (Ellis, 2000).

After April 1978, when the Soviet Union² took power women's situation was all the more enhanced. Seizing power, the Soviet Union introduced rapid reforms to change the political and social structure of the Afghan society. Women's rights to education, employment, mobility, and choice of spouse were considered among their major objectives (Moghadam, 1992). People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) intended to impose female education throughout the country in an effort to combat the very high level of illiteracy.

However, PDPA's initiatives met with strong opposition from traditional leaders in rural areas. There were some concerns that girls would be taught on the basis of an alien value system and that they would refuse to obey family authorities. Villagers believed that educating women brought dishonour to women and to the household because they were not in purdah anymore (Moghadam, 1992). Along the same line, too much emphasis on female education constituted an unbearable interference in domestic life. As a result, many people fled to Pakistan, and they cited

² Soviet Union backed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

their main reason as the use of force to have women attend literacy classes (Skaine, 2002). For others, however, it advanced their emancipation in the shape of greater opportunities for education, training, and employment. As a whole, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan inspired contradictory changes in the lives of Afghan women.

After the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan in 1992, changes became more uniform. The country plunged into the horror of the Mujahidin groups battling for control of the country. As Marsden (1998) specifies, the Mujahidin³ were all the Afghans who took up arms against the Soviet Union and regarded themselves as engaged in Jihad⁴. Eventually, an unstable government called the Mujahidin Government of the Islamic State of Afghanistan emerged as a coalition of seven Mujahidin parties (Marsden, 1998). Its president, Burhannudin Rabbani, suspended the Constitution and issued religious decrees that imposed a number of restrictions on women's freedom and mobility. They declared that women should not be perfumed, not wear clothes similar to men's, not wear makeup, and not have Western-styled hair. They should be completely covered, be educated only at home by fathers, brothers, or other relatives, and only learn the basics of Islam (Ellis, 2000).

In fact, during this period, women's positions were contradictorily situated. On the one hand, women were positioned into the role of the chaste women whose mobility and sexuality were strictly controlled. On the other hand, even these pure women were often victims of rape and other forms of violence at the hands of the Mujahidin (Khan, 2001). There existed no security for women. Their homes were invaded and their bodies were used as rewards for victorious soldiers. Women in custody were raped and sexually assaulted. Ellis (2000) profiled

³ Mujahidin means fighters in a holy war.

⁴ Jihad means holy war.

the case of a woman who was arrested on the street in Kabul by two armed Mujahidin guards and raped by twenty two Mujahidin fighters in a private detention center for three days. When she was finally allowed to go home, her three small children were dead from hypothermia.

Eventually, in 1996, the Taliban, who felt outraged at the behaviour of the Mujahidin leaders fighting for power, decided to take action. They determined to put an end to what they saw as corrupt practices, drawing on Islam as a justification for their intervention (Marsden, 1998). Ellis (2000) asserts that the Taliban began as a small group in Kandahar. Their soldiers are largely the orphans of twenty years of war, who grew up out of the mud and hopelessness of the refugee camps in Pakistan. The word *Taliban* means student of Islamic religious studies. They were educated at madrasa, religious schools, in Pakistan, and their education was largely limited to learning the Koran by repetition. Many of them had limited exposure to girls and women as they were growing up. They were raised by men who had a total disregard for women (Ellis, 2000). How they moved from small group to major force is not clear. However, it is likely that some elements outside Afghanistan decided to back them because they were potentially useful in promoting their interests. The nature and the extent of the backing received from outside has been the subject of much speculation. Pakistan, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia have all been implicated (Marsden, 1998; Skaine, 2002).

Seizing power, the Taliban implemented four central policies regarding women. First, women were forbidden to hold jobs, and their sole responsibility was to bring up the next generation of Muslims. Second, they could not attend schools until the Taliban had come up with a curriculum in accordance with the basics of Islam. Third, women were forced to wear burqas. Although women were obliged to wear chadors during the Mujahidin period, the Taliban implemented the policy that women must wear burqas that cover their faces as well to

completely observe the practice of wearing the hejab as recommended by Shariat. Finally, women were denied freedom of movement. They could only leave their homes if escorted by male relatives and had to avoid contact with male strangers (Marsden, 1998). If these rules were violated, the religious police would mete out punishments like public beatings and sometimes even death (Khan, 2001). In December, 1996, for example, the Radio Voice of Shariat⁵ announced that 225 women had been arrested and lashed for violating the clothing laws. In one such case, a woman in Kabul in October, 1996 had one of her thumbs cut off because she was wearing nail polish (Ellis, 2000). When women were punished, they must still wear burqas.

Indeed, as a result of implementing these harsh policies, women's situation was getting severely worse. According to UNICEF in January, 2000, 90 percent of girls and 75 percent of boys were not attending school in the Taliban-controlled areas. Women who had been once teachers and nurses moved in the streets like ghosts under their enveloping burqas for selling their every possession and begging to feed their children. The children were forced to beg in streets because the widowed women were prohibited to work. Women were beaten for showing up in public without a male chaperone or for showing their faces. Many women turned to prostitution. The business survived because of frequently relocating, bribing judicial authorities, and entertaining the Taliban free of charge (Ellis, 2000).

Furthermore, imposing such severe restrictions on women caused them many health problems. Women's fear of being beaten in streets deterred them from seeking health care. In most cases women could not go out to seek health care because they had no money to pay for a burqa. This harsh situation apart, the burqa itself could contribute to health problems like eye problems, poor vision and hearing, skin rash, headaches, asthma, hair loss, and depression. In

⁵ The Radio voice of Shariat was under the control of the Taliban and only broadcast religious debate and sermons.

addition, many women could not receive humanitarian assistance because the Taliban decreed that women could not pick up food or aid. A male relative had to pick up and deliver the aid to women. In the case of widows, this restriction was doubly harsh because they did not have male chaperons to pick up the aid (Skaine, 2002).

Yet reactions to the Taliban rule were not the same and largely depended on where people lived. For some people with a desperate longing for stability and peace after eighteen years of conflict almost any price was worth paying. Nevertheless, city-dwellers and particularly women found the rule of the Taliban abhorrent. In the Pashtun provinces of the east, as in the south, the Taliban were almost welcomed. People were grateful for the safety of roads. However, people in Herat resented the restrictions on their lives and deplored the violence in the result of violating rules. In Kabul, the reception was initially more ambivalent. People who were deeply angry about the various Mujahidin groups and tired of rocket attacks and guns on streets were appreciative for some peace. Yet as examples of the Taliban abuses of power increased and the evidence of the ethnic prejudice mounted, the educated Kabulis began to dislike the Taliban (Johnson, 1998).

Eventually, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon turned the page of the Afghanistan history book. In December, 2001, after the United States succeeded in its effort to oust the Taliban, the representatives of the anti-Taliban forces and several other Afghan parties signed the Bonn Agreement. They laid the basic rules for the development of women's roles and pledged to include them in political life (Skaine, 2008). Moreover, the Bonn Agreement required the transitional government to respect and protect the human rights of Afghan women and girls. The Agreement required the transitional government to ensure equal

access for women to education and healthcare and to encourage their full participation in all spheres of Afghan lives (Roshan, 2004).

However, in spite of progress in the country, Afghan women and girls continue to suffer low social, economic, and political status. Many women and girls still cannot travel without an accompanying male relative and without wearing burqas. Skaine (2008) lends more insight by cataloguing different forms of violence as abduction and rape by the armed individuals, forced marriage, being traded for settling disputes and debts, and discrimination in all segments of the society. Moreover, strict societal codes, invoked in the name of tradition and religion, justify denying women fundamental rights and have led to imprisoning and even killing some women. Authorities reinforce the violence by husbands and brothers, and communities tolerate. One of the members of the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), Mariam Rawi, describes Afghanistan in 2006 this way:

You might expect me to talk about Afghanistan as a free, peaceful and liberated country but painfully and unfortunately the reality is not what you might be aware of through the media. After September 11, and the subsequent U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan in the name of “war on terror” and “liberating Afghan women” despite all claims of the USA and its allies, Afghanistan is still burning in twofold fire. On the one hand, there are the brutal and horrific Jihadi fundamentalists of the “Northern Alliance” who are supported by the USA and on the other hand, there are the Taliban and al—Qa’ida terrorists who have the support of all the fundamentalist and terrorist regimes, parties and organization in different parts of the world. (Skaine, 2008, p. 28)

Rights of women are difficult to obtain in a country with nearly thirty years of instability, but the need to combat violence against women is gaining ground. In urban areas, women are coming forward to complain or to assert their rights. In both urban and rural areas, female networks of human rights defenders are forming (Skaine 2008). In *lifting the Veil*, a documentary on television's CNN, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, a Muslim journalist who returned to Afghanistan to see the changes after the Taliban, found that troublesome issues existed like women beggars in Kabul, self immolation, selling girls into marriage, increased risk for the educated women and female activists, and resistance at home for women's advancement including education and medical care. However, she observed some "pockets of hope" like new roads and power, more students in school, and a feeling of peace in some places among these bothersome findings (Skaine 2008, p. 25).

Alongside the stated coercions imposed on Afghan women throughout the different political periods in Afghanistan, the dominant patriarchal culture in the country affects women's lives and entails more restrictions and subordinations of women.

Patriarchal Culture in Afghanistan

According to Moghadam (1992) the term *patriarchy* is used to mark the specific gender arrangements based on patrilocal residence, i.e. living with the husband's family, and patrilineal descent, i.e. descending through the father. In Mann's (1986) elaboration of the history of patriarchy, patriarchal society is defined as one in which power is held by male heads of households. Mann explains that in a patriarchal society, power is shared between males and no female holds any formal public position of economic, ideological, military, or political power. Although this is what happens in the public sphere of patriarchal society, in the private sphere

there are other forms of patriarchy. For example, new brides gain respect via their sons and later in life, acquire power as mothers-in-law.

Moghadam (1992) notes that the patriarchal extended family gives the senior man authority over everyone else including younger men and entails forms of control and subordination of women that cut across cultural and religious boundaries. In his description of a peasant household in Russia, Shanin (1987) notes that despite women's heavy agricultural burdens and functional importance in the household, they were considered second-class members of it and were nearly always placed under the authority of a male.

Moghadam catalogues patriarchal forms of control over women in Afghanistan as the institutionalisation of external restrictive codes of behaviour for women, a practice of rigid gender segregation, specific forms of family and kinship, and a powerful ideology linking family honour to family virtue. Men are entrusted with safeguarding family honour through their control over female members. As Kabeer notes, for Bangladesh, this practice is backed by complex social arrangements that ensure the protection and dependence of women (as cited in Moghadam, 1992).

Moghadam argues that in the Middle East and South Asia the spread of patriarchy is uneven and strongest in rural areas. Compared to other countries in this area, Afghanistan is the strongest patriarchal society because it is predominantly rural with pre-capitalist forms of social organizations. One such case would be various forms of nomadic groups that entail the control of women in tightly interrelated lineages.

Moghadam further enumerates some contributing factors to the persistence of patriarchy including social structure, the stage of economic development, the nature and the objectives of

the state, political system, and ruling elites. In his description of patriarchy and the politics of gender in modernizing societies, Moghadam notes that the state has a main role in controlling the patriarchal structure outside of the household in society. Constructions of gender and discourse about women are sometimes a convenient weapon employed by contending political groups. Political elites or states may raise the women question to divert attention from economic problems or political corruption. Another reason why states may find it useful to foster patriarchal structures is that the extended family performs vital welfare functions. The joint household system and intergenerational wealth flows, which are among the characteristics of the patriarchal structures, provide welfare and security for its members (Moghadam, 1992).

Yet despite the dominant patriarchal culture in Afghanistan and therefore more restricted, oppressed conditions for women, some academic studies contend that Afghan women are not necessarily voiceless and powerless. These scholars argue that Afghan women have been capable to fight to survive and to take part in social participation to reclaim their rights and further their enhancement.

Afghan Women's Survival Strategies and Social Participation throughout History

Women's survival strategies.

Although the twenty two years of war and violent conflict eroded social capital⁶ in Afghanistan, women were capable to organise around gender-related survival strategies and became aware of more gender-specific concerns. They worked together in groups and organizations and generated networks, norms, and trust in their communities. Rostami (2003)

⁶ Social capital is the connections between people that promote the sharing of norms and values (Terrion & Legacé, 2008).

uncovers how women in Afghanistan have bravely shown their capacity to devise ways of coping with life even under the most extreme forms of coercion. As social actors, women have experienced 22 years of war, civil war, and violent conflict and have sought alternative ways of surviving and formulating their objectives within a context of restricted resources and restrictive cultural practices (Rostami, 2003).

Rostami points out that many prominent women chose to stay in Afghanistan and worked either openly or clandestinely towards empowering other women. The non-Governmental Women's Vocational Training Center has been active for 20 years and has offered women in Kabul courses in English and German as well as computer skills courses. Activists have also provided courses in handcrafts, animal husbandry, bee-keeping, and honey making in rural areas outside Kabul. They created income-generating activities for women. When the Taliban came to power and closed the institution, women continued their underground activities in their homes. In addition, during the Taliban rules the Women's Association of Afghanistan funded and managed secret sewing, knitting, and handicraft courses for women. The doctors in the Rabee Balkhi Women's Hospital in Kabul were all educated. Setting up the hospital in Kabul had the advantage of allowing these women to perform surgery (Rostami, 2003).

Alongside activists and social actors, the majority of poor women in urban and rural areas never left Afghanistan. Those with the necessary skills turned their homes into underground schools. They were paid for these services by their neighbours, friends, and families. In this way, women were able to financially survive. Networking and group solidarity enabled these women to remain in touch with each other. The other women who possessed few skills or lost their male head of household had no choice but to become beggars or sex workers. These poor women relied only on women's support networks to meet their bare necessities (Rostami, 2003).

Women in Afghanistan as social and political participants.

When we study the history of Afghanistan, we realize that Afghans have held women in high esteem. Queen Gawhar Shad from her throne in Herat ruled an empire from the Tigris River to China from 1447 to 1457. Queen Soraya⁷ established the first women's magazine, *Irshadi Niswan* (The Guide for Women) in 1921. In addition, she was the one who set up the first Afghan women's hospital and girl's school in Afghanistan. Likewise, she was the first woman to have publically taken off her veil during a Loya Jirga (Grand Council) meeting in 1928. Kubra⁸ was in charge of *Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Niswan* (Women's Protection Association) to promote women's emancipation (Skaine, 2002). A few Afghan women attended the NGO Forum on Women that was part of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in China in September 1995. As a result of this forum, they decided to set up the Afghan Women's Network to advocate for peace and women's rights in Afghanistan (Johnson, 1998). The famous heroine, Malalai, took off her veil and waved it as a banner over her head while leading the warriors into battle with the British in Maiwand in 1880. To incite the warriors she recited the couplet: "my beloved, if you do not fall a martyr at the battle at MAIWANT, By God, someone must be saving you for a life of shame" (Johnson, 1998, p. 47).

After 1979, when the Soviets took over, much of the grass-roots opposition to their presence came from women. To illustrate, Ellis (2000) points to organizing huge demonstrations in streets, gathering at the gates of Pul-e-charki Prison in Kabul to demand the release of political prisoners, and being involved in anti-government protests. On April 21, 1980, high school girls led anti-government protests all over Kabul. The protests went on for many days. Thirty female

⁷ Queen Soraya was the wife of King Amanullah.

⁸ Kubra was the sister of King Amanullah.

and twenty male students were killed by police, and thousands students were arrested (Ellis, 2000). They fought because they believed that the Russians showed disrespect to the dignity of Afghan women (Skaine, 2002).

However, women's activities were not restricted to rallies and protest demonstrations. They participated in organized struggles such as abduction, assassination, and bombing of the enemy position (Skaine, 2002). In cities, the women's underground was organized in three sections. One group investigated people who were suspected of cooperating with the enemy. Another group followed the suspects and discovered their connections. The third group carried out assassinations. In Kandahar, they hid the weapons under their burqas to replace them (Ellis, 2000). In countryside, women cooked for the Mujahidin fighters and carried out food to them in the hills. They worked on fields at night because of bombing runs during the day. Sometimes they fired upon the Soviets from windows when the Soviets came to search a village (Ellis, 2000). Women paid a heavy price for these activities. Hundreds of women and girls were arrested and tortured, and many were executed.

Women continued to have their active participation in political arena under the Taliban rule. Skaine (2002) mentions the demonstration in front of the governor's office by poor beggar women in 1996. The women determined to persuade the governor to order shopkeepers to accept small bank notes, or the shops would be closed. Later in 1996 in Kabul when the Taliban protested against foreign interference, women held a five hour rally in Mazar-e- Sharif, producing slogans such as "Taliban law is not Islamic Law" (Skaine, 2002, p. 21). Toward the end of 1996 in Herat, 50 women protested the closing of women's bath houses (Skaine, 2002). Alongside rallies and protest demonstrations, their activities were largely concentrated on running secret schools, which addressed the practical needs of women like education and

vocational training (Moser, 1989). Of course, many of these women were caught by the Taliban, but even though they were persecuted, jailed, and tortured, these women continued their bitter struggle. They encouraged other women to fight for their rights, and they have successfully gained the trust and support of communities (Rostami, 2003). In one such case, the Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association (RAWA) began to advocate women's role in the political life of the country and their rights to access to education, training, and employment while remaining within the Islamic fold (Marsden, 1998). RAWA ran schools for girls and mobile health-care teams. All courses and all home-based classes were completely underground. They supported income-generating projects like carpet weaving for women. They were hit with sticks, arrested, and put in prison, but they continued to fight (Skaine, 2002).

Such evidence supports the findings of Johnson and Moghadam that Afghan women have not been "passive targets of policies or the victims of distorted development," but that "they are also shapers and makers of social change" (as cited in Skaine, 2002, p. 21), who found ways to move forward despite the loss and the suffering the war has brought.

The above literature review examined the trends and findings that have been significant to shed the light on the active backdrop of women throughout the history of Afghanistan. The thin history of Afghan women's participation in social and political arena speaks to the fact that Afghan women are active agents who fought to survive the war and risked their lives to restore their basic rights. Against such a backdrop, the present study intends to explore how *A Thousand Splendid Suns* contributes to the readers' understanding of Afghan women. To this end, it is significant to review the relevant literature on the image of Afghan women in the Western media and realize how readers perceive Afghan women by means of the Western media.

Afghan Women in the Western Media

In exploring the representations of Afghan women in the Western mass media, many scholars agree that Afghan women are most frequently mentioned with regards to the veil (Ansari, 2008; Cloud, 2004; Klaus & Kassel, 2005; Sarikakis, 2002; Schwartz-DuPre, 2010; Shirvani, 2002; Sreberny, 2002; Stabile & Kumar, 2005). Klaus and Kassel (2005) argue that this highly symbolic garment penetrates photographs and texts alike. In both text and photograph, the burqa symbolizes the oppression of women, and it is used as a means to raise the emotion of readers.

Stabile and Kumar (2005) uncover how after the downfall of the Taliban, the U.S. news media was flooded with the images of women taking off their veils. Shortly after the Taliban regime was defeated, *Time magazine* featured a photo of Afghan women without burqas. At the same time, *News Week* ran an article titled “Now I see the sunlight” (p. 773). *USA Today* described a scene of liberation of Afghan women who shed the enveloping burqas and threw them on the fire. *Business Week* ran an article that featured a photograph of an unveiled Afghan woman with the word “liberation” printed above her (p. 774).

In German newspapers and magazines as well, a number of identical photographs appeared that pictured a young woman with an unveiled face smiling happily into the camera, surrounded by others still wearing burqas (Klaus & Kassel, 2005). During the same period, CNN reported that after the fall of Kabul, women have begun removing all-enveloping burqas (Fahmy, 2003). The message of the articles was quite clear; the Americans appeared as ultimate saviours of Afghan women and moved them from darkness to light by taking off their yoke of oppression.

However, the nature of the veil as a signifier of women's inferiority and oppression is not a new topic. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to this area (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Cloud, 2004; Donnell, 1999; Droogsma, 2007; Hooks, 2001; Schwartz- DuPre, 2010; Shirvani, 2002; Streberny, 2002). For many Western readers, images of veiled women serve as universal signifiers of religious, familial, and cultural oppression. These images are often used to illustrate the backwardness and subordination of women (Droogsma, 2007). However, contrary to the popular media picture of the veil as a tool of subjugation, Sheida Shirvani (2002) and Annabelle Streberny (2002) argue that Muslim women perceive the veil as a means of "exerting personal control and forcing others to deal with the person without the complication of her physical form"(p. 269). They choose the veil as part of a search for increased dignity and status, as a coping strategy to gain or maintain social esteem, and as a form of self-expression. In the Afghanistan context, Shirvani (2002) discusses that the burqa worn by Afghan women during the Taliban regime was "an enforced symbol of their gendered social position, not of their sex" (p. 268). In fact, this is the religious interpretation of the society's male leadership that forced the veil upon women as a symbol of honour and modesty and subjugated women educationally and professionally.

Apart from the existing arguments on the veil, in the context of Afghanistan, understanding the veiled women as oppressed enables the Western readers to position themselves as saviours of victims of barbarism, renders the subjectivity of Afghan women for their liberation invisible, and legitimizes the war in Afghanistan as a sort of intervention to rescue the oppressed women.

On this account, many scholars base their discussion around the concept of the protection scenario and the Orientalism. According to the logic of the protection scenario, women must be

protected from the predatory advances of some real or imaginary enemy. However, Stabile and Kumar (2005) emphasize that this narrative has never been an innocent or progressive discourse aimed at improving the situation of women. Instead, by rendering women the passive victims of war to serve the purpose of imperialist domination, the discourse of protection used by politicians and the media alike denied women any agency in decision making processes. Rhetoric of Orientalism as well is raised as a dominant discourse in portraying Afghan women in the Western mass media. Based on the argument of Edward Said concerning the concept of the Orientalism, Stabile and Kumar (2005) contend that in the Orientalist thought, the world is divided into two unequal parts; the Orient and the Occident or the West. This imaginative geography is characterized by caricatures and stereotypes that bear little resemblance to reality. Such stereotypes, on the one hand, make Europeans and the West as somehow more democratic, more civilized, and more industrious and give them a sense of its own cultural and intellectual superiority. On the other hand, they render the Orient uncivilized and barbaric who need to be tamed.

In exploring the *Time.com* photo essays, Cloud (2004) bases her discussion around the same argument and uncovers how images of the essay encourage the Western viewers to lament the status of Afghan women and to support the U.S. intervention. She argues that the sequence of images suggest the invisibility and wandering of Afghan women before the U.S. attacks and their liberation after the U.S. intervention. She emphasizes that although the oppression of women under the Taliban rule is well documented, the aim of these essays is beyond representing that reality; they caricaturize the victimization of Afghan women to generate mercy and pity from readers for Afghan women and the Afghan society in general. As Klaus and Kassel (2005) similarly shows, the veil is far more often mentioned as means of oppression under the Taliban

regime, and the removal of the veil is frequently presented as a sign of newly gained freedom after the regime was defeated. Meanwhile, the media rarely dealt with the plight of women refugees, violation of their rights, and lack of humanitarian help.

Likewise, Sarikakis (2002), given the argument of Arat-Koc , claims that the Western media made Afghan women into victims of barbarism and exploited their image as well as appalling conditions under which Afghan women have to lead their lives to seduce readers into endorsing the war and legitimize the military intervention in Afghanistan.

In analysis of the National Geographic's famous 1985 image, Schwartz-DuPre (2010) constructs the same argument. She argues that the Afghan Girl image has less to do with Afghanistan and a good deal more to do with how Americans come to figure as saviours of the Afghan society. In exploring the Afghan Girl image, she identifies six salient signifiers, namely veil, age, eyes, anonymity, refugee, and femininity. The veil of the Afghan Girl can be read as a signifier of Afghan repression. Image of childhood reveals the themes of vulnerability, dependence, and insecurity. The Afghan Girl's green eyes encourage identification between herself and her Western readers. The Girl's anonymity performs the role of any and probably, every Afghan girl. Finally, the sympathy that viewers have for the Afghan Girl might be understood as a result of the stereotypes Westerners impose on women of the Third World. Borrowing the words of Chandra Mohanty's landmark essay "Under Western Eyes," Schwartz-DuPre enumerates the stereotypes as "Victims of male violence," "colonial process," "familial structure," and "religion" (p. 350). She argues that these signifiers together create a unified assemblage that renders the Afghan Girl an oppressed victim of war and generates sympathy and responsibility from readers. She bases the discussion around the concept of portraying suffering victims put forth by Journalist Simon Watney (1990) who recognizes the universal victim

category as one that engages the responsibility of readers. Schwartz DuPre comes to the conclusion that the National Geographic's 1985 Afghan Girl foments sympathy for Afghanistan and the desire to aid its people. She lays further emphasis that the image of Afghan Girl positions her readers as her potential saviours, who promote the unveiling of girls and parenting of orphans.

Furthermore, the textual analysis of the articles published in two leading news magazines *Der Spiegel* and *Focus* in Germany by Klaus and Kassel (2005) reveals that the presentation of Afghan women by the media does not necessarily mean reporting about women. In fact, women's interests, needs, rights, or opinions were rarely discussed. She argues that women are seen as mute victims of the Taliban: their interests and viewpoints remain largely hidden. Moreover, their muteness endured in the Post-Taliban times, and they were not generally granted voices as citizens after the liberation of Kabul. Women are seldom portrayed as the agents who actively shape their own lives and futures. Whenever politically active women are represented at all, readers learn more about their personal backgrounds and their present circumstances rather than their political opinions.

Contrary to the present findings, examining AP wire photographs that are published and used in the top U.S. media outlets, Fahmy (2003) found out that the photographs make an effort to frame Afghan women in less static mode and less stereotypical roles after the fall of the Taliban. She concludes that women under the post-Taliban regime are portrayed as more involved, more interactive, more socially intimate, and symbolically equal to viewers.

The above literature review makes known that the Western media, in general, get the readers perceive Afghan women as mute victims of war and barbarism who have no agency in

getting their liberation and shaping their own lives and futures. Recognizing the high readership of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* among the Western readers (Kakutani, 2007), the literature reviewed underlines the significance of exploring the contribution of the popular novels, namely *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to the Western readers' understanding of Afghan women.

Afghan Media

Alongside exploring the image of Afghan women in the Western media, reviewing the history of the media in Afghanistan in different political periods furthers our understanding of the challenges facing Afghan women as a result of being represented in the media.

Since its inception in 1873, the Afghan press has been heavily influenced by the nation's political and cultural values. For the first time in the history of Afghanistan, right to free speech for every Afghan citizen was provided in the 1923 Constitution by King Abdul-Rahman Khan (Rawan, 2002), while independent media began with the promulgation of the 1964 Constitution by King Mohammad Zahir Sha (Samad, 2006). In fact, it was the only period in which the operation of truly independent journalism was permitted. With the overthrow of Zahir Sha, increasing restrictions were imposed on the media during the period of President Mohammad Daoud (1973-78), the Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (1978-92), the Mujahidin (1992-1996), and they were culminating in the hard-line Taliban regime (1996-2002) (Pressreference, 2010).

TV has only been in existence since the early 1970s with a very restricted daily broadcasting time. However, the Taliban, who found TV against their strict interpretation of Islam, banned TV in all areas under their control (Torfeh, 2009). For their propagation, the Taliban had Radio Voice of Shariat, which only broadcast religious debate and sermons. They

also had some of the former newspapers, which featured their official announcements, news of military victories, and criticism of any opposition (Pressreference, 2010). Indeed, the print media was virtually nonexistent during the Taliban regime.

After five years of silence, on November 18, 2001, the first image broadcast by the public television channel Kabul Television was the face of a woman regarded as a symbol of hope for change (Torfeh, 2009). Now there are scores of radio stations, dozens of TV stations, and some hundred active press titles that realize the hope for change. They operate under a wide range of ownerships- from the government, provincial political-military powers and private owners to foreign and NGO sponsors. Much of the output on private TV stations consists of imported Indian music shows and serials and programs modelled on Western formats. The proliferation of the local media, the development of the Afghanistan Government's ability to communicate with its citizens ,and the infusion of international capacity, equipment, and funding to the media sector are deemed to be essential factors in creating the Afghan media from 2002 onwards (Soulé, 2009). However, media laws prohibit material that is considered to run counter to Islamic Law (BBC, 2011) on the one hand, and on the other, the views of the government, warlords, and drug mafia do find their way into the media; the press media has had to be approved inside a parliament whose composition includes many fundamentalist politicians and warlords (Torfeh, 2009).

Furthermore, social barriers like mixed ethnic groups with historic conflicts, language differences, low literacy and income levels, underdeveloped educational and other social welfare institutions are among the crucial obstacles to bar media development (Pressreference, 2010). Alongside contributing factors in banning media development, lack of adequate advertising market to support the large number of media outlets (Siddiqi, 2005) and persistent inexperience

of the marketing team (Torfeh, 2009) are important factors behind media failure to become self-supporting.

Among the various mass media tools, radio is very common and serves as the main source of information for Afghans of all socioeconomic level. In fact, radio was the backbone on which the Afghan media was rebuilt (Siddiqi, 2005). The potential newspaper reader is small because Afghanistan has a low literacy rate. Internet access is scarce, and computer literacy and ownership rates are low (BBC, 2011).

The role of women in the Afghan media has been controversial. Now, eight years after the Taliban ordered women journalists to go home and banished them from appearing on television or representing in any form of media (Torfeh, 2009), the number of women is increasing in the world of journalism. Despite the ban on employment and education during the Taliban hard-line regime, women in Afghanistan are taking jobs as journalists, television presenters, broadcasters, and reporters. However, apart from the continued social barriers and cultural restrictions, women in Afghanistan face deadly threats backed by the fundamentalist Islamic elements in the parliament and ministries; The murder of Zakia Zaki, the director of Radio Sulh, and Shaima Rezayee, the presenter of a popular music show on the private Tolo TV (Esfandiari, 2007), are two clear examples of fatal threats to women journalists in Afghanistan.

Media Construction of Reality

Although the impact of the media is not the interest of this study, it is worthy of exploration since the impact of the media implicitly underlines the significance of the study. Depiction of Afghan women is important for the influence it leaves on readers. To understand how women's portrayals in the media can encourage readers to shape their image of Afghan

women, this study explores the construction of reality through the media and examines the impact of mediated reality on the Western readers.

The mass media are seen by many scholars as playing a vital role in shaping perceptions of the world (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). In fact, the theory of social construction of reality contends that the mass media help construct and maintain the world by re-presenting particular meanings and understandings of reality (Berger & Luchmann, 1967). Representation, as Hall (1997) argues, implies the active work of selecting and presenting and of structuring and shaping. It is not merely the transmitting of an already existing meaning, but the more active labour of "making things mean" (p. 46). Shoemaker and Reese (1991) assert that the media content is both a manifestation of culture and a source of culture. That is, the media content takes elements of culture, magnifies them, frames them, and feeds them back to readers, thus "imposing their logic in creating a symbolic environment" (p. 49). In their analysis of the role of the media in understanding of reality, Shoemaker and Reese used Lippmann's concept of stereotypes to emphasize the important distinction between reality and social reality, that is, as Lippmann termed it "the world outside" of actual events and our mediated knowledge of those events (as cited in Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, p. 49).

Against such a backdrop, the researcher argues that the media play a vital role in portraying Afghan women and in representing Afghan women to the world. They influence the attitudes of readers toward Afghan women. Portraying Afghan women in the media as oppressed, powerless victims of war and violence induces readers to construct the same image and makes it difficult for Afghan women to change such attitudes. To support such claim, the researcher draws upon Shoemaker and Reese's (1991, p. 49) suggestion in their *Mediating the Message* that if we assume that culture must change, adapt, and improve, then the media content

may serve as either a catalyst for or a brake on this change. By portraying women as homemakers, for example, content may be magnifying a kernel of truth, but the strengths and pervasiveness of those symbols may make it more difficult for women to be accepted in non-stereotypical roles.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the impact of constructed image of women in the media on the readers who have never encountered an Afghan woman. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) contend that we depend on second-hand sources for our knowledge about that part of the world beyond our immediate perceptual grasp. Echoing the same argument, Fishman (1980) points out that the media consumers are led to see the world outside first-hand experience through the eyes of the media. Silverstein and Flamenbaum (1989) contend that the information and impressions that people receive from the mass media are far less influential when they have firsthand experience with these issues and groups upon which perceptions are built. Yet in cases where personal experience is limited, the media may virtually be the only vivid source of information.

The above reviewed literature underpins the role of the media in strengthening stereotypes and shaping the perceptions of the world. However, the major concern of the present study is the persuasive function of narratives and novels. This concern makes it necessary to discuss fictional narratives' influential power and their contribution to shaping the attitudes of readers.

Fictional Narratives

The power of stories is well noted (Appel & Richter, 2007; Appel, 2008; Dijk, 1993; Ehrenhaus, 1993; Gerrig, 1993; Langellier & Peterson, 1993; Nakagawa, 1993; Nell, 1988;

Strange, 2002; Wheeler, Green & Brock, 1999; Witten, 1993; Wolf, 1973; Zelizer, 1993). From nothing more than a sequence of textual, visual, and auditory symbols, we construct worlds that we are cognitively and emotionally engaging in (Oatley, 1994) to the point that we may have difficulty in returning to the real world and may even see some aspects of the real world differently afterward (Gerrig, 1993). That is, as Appel and Richter echo (Appel & Richter, 2007; Appel, 2008), narratives have an implicit influence on the way people view the world and on shifting people's worldview.

Moreover, stories are a major discourse genre for the reproduction of culture and society. Appel and Richter (2007) contend that fictional narratives conveyed by books, movies, and television programs play an important part in everyday lives and, therefore, in the socialization of children, adolescents, and adults. Dijk (1993) asserts that stories contribute to the "reproduction of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, norms or values of a group or of society as a whole" (p. 125). Demonstrating the persuasive function of narratives in reproducing the values of a group, Radway in *Narrative Impact* constructs the same argument. She echoes some of the concerns she has encountered about female teenagers. She constructs a hopeful image of the impact of narratives on the self-construction of adolescents in a period in which they are ready to lose their sense of self as "the culture transfers them into the female teenagers whose only project is their own body" (Eubank, 2003, p. 240).

Moreover, the power of narratives is not restricted to remote stories where readers do not accomplish the first hand experience of exposure. In 1999, Wheeler, Green, and Brock constructed an experiment aimed at illuminating how fictional narratives may influence beliefs. The participants were selected from undergraduates at Ohio State University. They were asked to read some stories that contained both true and false assertions about real-world topics and took

place either at Yale or at Ohio State University. Their findings contribute strong evidence for the persuasiveness of narratives. In reporting the findings, the authors indicate that participants were persuaded by both remote and local story versions. The authors claim that readers are automatically persuaded by stories unless some corrective information is present, which challenges the assertions and induces the readers to doubt the truth of the stories. Gerrig (1993) constructs the same argument. In revealing the rhetorical power of fictions, he concludes that the majority of fictional effects become a part of the body of information through which readers make judgements. He asserts that fictions will “fail to have a real-world impact only if readers expend explicit effort to understand them as fictional” (p. 240).

Given the present arguments, the persuasive function of the select novel in this study, namely *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is worth exploring. Indeed, the importance of conducting the current study lies in the fact that readers may be persuaded by the information put forth by *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and they may harbour some thoughts and opinions about Afghan women and the Afghan society in general via this body of information. Hence, in a situation where the readers’ understanding of Afghan women largely depends on the mediated portrayals of Afghan women, this novel comes to figure as significant outlet through which readers get access to information about Afghan women and their situation.

Moreover, novels are capable to construct the realities which are far less similar to the real world. This argument is supported by Zelizer’s (1993) findings in an analysis of narratives told by American Journalists about Lee Harvey Oswald’s murder, John F. Kennedy’s presumed killer. Having explored the way American journalists have sought and succeeded to shape their own self-image through retellings of Oswald’s murder, Zelizer (1993) found out that narratives play an important role in setting forth preferred constructions of reality. He confirms that in an

age where many people do not accomplish the primary experience of public events and instead depend on mediated experiences, narratives are used to alter realities and to serve the purpose of narrators' agenda. Hence, the novel that this study will be examining could potentially construct the realities about Afghan women that bear little resemblance to the real situation of women in Afghanistan. It could serve the purpose of flattering the Western readers by giving them a sense of superiority and a sense of being potential saviours as maintained by Stabile and Kumar (2005) and Schwartz-DuPre (2010) in exploring the contribution of the Western media to featuring Afghan women. Higher readership among the Western readers and more popularity of the novel could be the ultimate purposes in praising readers.

Furthermore, the power of narratives in strengthening stereotypes is well examined. Langellier and Peterson (1993) demonstrate the important role of narratives in the ongoing construction of particular family formations and relations of control. They confirm that "stories and storytelling both generate and reproduce the family by legitimating meanings and power relations that privilege, for example, parents over children, males over females, and the white, middle-class family over alternative family structures" (p. 50).

By the same token, another example would be the role of narratives in the reproduction of racism. Dijk (1993) bases this argument around the power of stories in maintaining and legitimating dominant power and ideologies. Examining some minority stories⁹, he concludes that minority stories function as complaints by majority group members and as expressions of negative experiences or prejudices about minorities. In sum, he argues that minority stories express and reproduce white group power by persuasively making the point that "we" are better than "them," or "they" fail to meet the standards set by "our" values (p. 141).

⁹ Minority stories are stories about minorities.

Drawing on this argument, the novel under investigation could potentially strengthen and maintain the stereotypes about Afghan women that render Afghan women passive victims of war who are desperately in need of protection and make the West as potential saviours who generously lend a hand to rescue Afghan women. Moreover, the fact that the persuasive function of stories are persistent and can even increase over time (Appel & Richter, 2007) lays more emphasis on the significance of the role of the novel in portraying Afghan women and representing them to the world.

To demonstrate the rhetorical power of the novel this study will examine, the researcher draws upon the argument proposed by Wolf (1973) about the modern novel's narrative power. He identifies four devices that give the realistic novel its unique power, namely its "immediacy," its "concrete reality," its "emotional involvement," and its "absorbing" quality (p. 31). Immediacy is the result of scene by scene construction of novels and telling the story by moving from scene to scene. Concrete reality is engendered through recording the dialogue in full. A realistic dialogue involves the reader more completely than any other single device and defines characters more quickly and more effectively. As the third device, using the third-person point of view involves the reader emotionally. This point of view presents each scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character and gives the reader the feeling of being inside the character's mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene. Finally, the essence of absorbing power of novels is recording all symbolic details of the protagonists' status lives, like their gestures, habits, furniture, clothing, housekeeping, behaviours toward children, or style of walking.

Against such a backdrop, the researcher argues that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* contributes to shaping the attitude and the belief of readers toward Afghan women. This novel

functions as a witness to the Afghan culture and as a device for interpreting the lives and the worlds of Afghan women. Indeed, what the Western readers understand throughout the novels about Afghan women is even more powerful than statistics and facts (Witten, 1993). The arguments proposed in this bulk speak to the fact that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* implicitly influence the way the Western readers understand Afghan women and the way they make judgments about Afghan women's worlds. That is the reason as to why the current study intends to find out what sort of information is offered by this novel. As Wheeler, Green, and Brock (1999) argue, the power of these novels is not restricted to the influence on the readers for whom the Afghan society rests beyond the immediate perceptual grasp. It also includes those who have been exposed to glimpses of Afghan lives.

In short, the present arguments function as evidence to the power of narratives. They back the claim of the present study that novels persuade readers and that they play a major role in constructing the world of Afghan women to readers. They are able to alter reality and single out the realities that better fit the narrators' agenda. Accordingly, it is important to detect the portrayals of Afghan women that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* offers to the Western readers.

Research Questions

Against the above backdrop, the researcher hypothesizes that the stereotypical portrayals of Afghan women are reinforced in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. In an effort to depict how women are portrayed in this novel, the following research questions are posed to help the researcher guide through the present study:

RQ1: what are the fantasy themes identified within the novel?

RQ2: what is the emergent rhetorical vision(s) within the novel?

RQ3: how are the emergent fantasy themes chained out among the Western readers?

Chapter Summary

In chapter two, a review of relevant literature on the topic of Afghan women's portrayals in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was provided. It examined the situation of Afghan women during the four major historical periods in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, a quick look at the survival strategies and social participation of Afghan women in the same periods revealed the capability of Afghan women to fight to survive the war, to restore their basic rights, and to incite other women to contribute to shaping their own lives. Likewise, it explored the portrayals of Afghan women in the Western media to realize how the Western media contribute to the readers' understanding of Afghan women. The literature reviewed suggested that contrary to the active backdrop of Afghan women throughout the history of Afghanistan, the Western media fail to feature the active contribution of Afghan women in shaping their lives and reclaiming their rights. Examining the Afghan media and the challenges Afghan women have met as a result of being represented in the media constituted another major portion of the section. It further discussed the media construction of reality and the persuasive function of fictional narratives and novels, which implicitly underlines the significance of the study. Based on the literature reviewed, the research questions guiding this study were posed. In the following chapter, the research design and the methodology to carry out the present study are described.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and the methodological approach used in this study. To provide a thorough understanding of the methodology and its application in the present study, this chapter in detail discusses fantasy theme analysis, review of fantasy theme analysis research, methodological approach, procedure, and justifications for the rhetorical artifact employed in this study.

Fantasy Theme Analysis

The fantasy theme method of rhetorical criticism was designed by Ernest G. Bormann in 1972 to describe the shared world view of groups of rhetors. This method looks at how symbolic convergence occurs and how it is maintained through the rhetoric of groups (Foss, 1996). Bormann's work on fantasy theme analysis and Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) was inspired by *Personality and Interpersonal Behaviour* authored by Robert Bales in 1970. In his article, Robert Bales found that group members participate in a process of fantasizing that created a shared reality for the group. Dramatizing communication creates social reality for groups of people and provides critics with a way to examine messages for understanding the groups' culture, motivation, emotion, and cohesion (Bormann, 1972).

Bormann (1972) in "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality" describes how fantasizing communication occurs in a small group:

The tempo of the conversation would pick up. People would grow excited, interrupt one another, blush, laugh, and forget their self-consciousness. The tone of the meeting often quiet and tense immediately prior to the dramatizing, would become lively, animated, and

boisterous, the chaining process, involving both verbal and nonverbal communication, indicating participation in the drama. (p. 397)

Later, Bormann (1972) argues that these moments happen not only in small groups, but also in larger groups hearing a public speech. Hence, as Foss (2004) reflects, Bormann extended the notion of fantasizing discovered by Bales into Symbolic Convergence Theory and the method of fantasy theme analysis. Bormann (1972) claims that alongside the story of small groups, this method can be used to describe, interpret, and evaluate rhetorical materials like persuasive postures, specific movements, campaigns, speeches, and conversations that comprise the symbolic reality of groups of people. These groups could be small groups, organizational work units, political parties, or other rhetorical communities.

To explain fantasy theme analysis, Bormann (1985) indicates, it is necessary first to delineate the major concepts of fantasy theme analysis that forms an important part of this perspective.

Key concepts of fantasy theme analysis.

In order to examine dramas and understand the fantasy themes of those dramas, critics must identify the fantasies and the elements within them marked by the following technical vocabularies (Bormann, 1985; Cragan & Sheilds, 1992; Foss, 2004; Kidd, 2004).

Fantasy theme: Bormann defines a fantasy theme as a dramatizing message that stimulates the chaining process; it is the story used to explain a group's experience that becomes a shared reality for the individuals participating in the communicative interaction (Foss, 2004). Fantasy in this use does not mean unreal. Fantasy refers to the "creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events that fulfills a group psychological or rhetorical need" (Bormann, 1985, p.

130). The fantasies may be fictional or may be dealing with factual matters. Factual matters are the incidents that have actually happened to members of a group or that are reported in the news media or in the oral history and folklore of other groups and communities. In every case, however, critics deal with interpretations. They look at how individuals see their world and cast it into dramatic form.

When fantasy themes are chained out and disseminated to the larger society through the mass media, the participants have constructed a social reality that serves to “create a sense of identity and community” (Bormann, 1985, p. 3). In turn, the shared consciousness of the group functions to sustain the fantasy (Bormann, 1985).

A fantasy theme depicts personae, plotline, scene, and sanctioning agent.

Personae: particular fantasy themes attribute qualities to characters. The identifiable characters may include both heroic and villainous personae and supporting players. Readers are attracted to the heroic personae and feel an antipathy toward the negative character. These responses arouse emotions and generate the involvement of readers in the story.

Plotline: a plotline provides the action of a rhetorical vision. It explains how the central characters face conflicts in their effort to reach the goal.

Scene: scene details the location of the action. In some rhetorical visions, scene is so important that it influences the qualities attributed to the personae or the plotlines generated within the vision. One example is the rhetorical vision of “the Holocaust” (Cragan & Shields, 1992, p. 202).

Sanctioning agent: a sanctioning agent legitimizes the rhetorical vision. It is the bottom-line value that justifies the decision of the central figure and the characterization of success or

failure of the enterprise. For example, for the Harlequin romance fantasy types, the sanctioning agent is “romantic love” (Kidd, 2004, Elements of fantasy theme analysis, Para.19). Knowing the sanctioning agent can be useful in grasping the dimension of the rhetorical vision and the particulars of given fantasy themes. However, the sanctioning agent is so central to most fantasy themes and rhetorical visions that critics often do not see any need to state it.

Symbolic cue: one of the powers of the fantasy theme is that it does not have to be retold in full to evoke the message after a reader has accepted it. Images can be conveyed to all but new readers by what Bormann (1985) has labelled symbolic cue or *insider cue*. A symbolic cue may be a code word, phrase, slogan, nonverbal sign, or gesture. They serve to trigger previously shared fantasies and emotions. For example, in the American society, people are familiar with the phrase “crying Wolf” without having to hear the whole fable of “the Boy Who Cried Wolf” again (Kidd, 2004, Elements of fantasy theme analysis, Para. 3).

Fantasy type: Bormann (1985) uses the phrase *fantasy type* to refer to the particular fantasies shared by members of a group or larger community with similar plotlines, scenes, characters, and situations. This fantasy type or *stock scenario* is repeated again and again with the same or similar characters. For instant, “Harlequin romance novels” are a fantasy type. Each novel has the same type of heroine, the same hero, the same struggle to find true love, and the same happy ending (Kidd, 2004, Elements of fantasy theme analysis, Para. 4).

Rhetorical vision: Bormann (1985) explains that “when a number of people come to share a cluster of fantasy themes and types, they may integrate them into a coherent rhetorical vision of some aspect of their social reality” (p. 133). A rhetorical vision is then a unified putting-together of the various scripts that gives the participants a broader view of things. They are usually

identified by a key word, slogan, or label. Recent labels for rhetorical visions in the United States, for example, have included “the New Deal,” “the Cold War,” and “the Moral Majority” (p. 133). Some of the rhetorical visions may be shared by only a few people, and they may last only for short periods of time. On the other hand, some rhetorical visions are so all-encompassing that they permeate an individual’s social reality in all aspects of living. These rhetorical visions are called *lives-style rhetorical visions*; many of the religious rhetorical visions in the United States are examples of lives-style rhetorical vision.

Review of Fantasy Theme Analysis Research

Bormann (1985), in “Symbolic Convergence Theory; A Communication Formulation”, delineates different areas in which Symbolic Convergence Theory has been applied. It has been used to conduct market analysis and public opinions polls, to analyse readers for public speeches, and to examine popular culture and political campaigns. Likewise, it has been applied as the basis for historical and critical studies of mass persuasion and mass media communication and as a way to improve organizational and small group communication. The symbolic convergence theory provides a system for making systematic explanations of a variety of human communication within the general approach of the narrative paradigm.

Some examples of the use of fantasy theme analysis in individual rhetorical vision studies are as following: R.C. Aden (1986) used fantasy theme analysis to ascertain the rhetorical vision of Ronald Regan in his 1984 presidential campaign. Stephane D. Perry and Amanda L. Roesch (2004) looked for religious themes on tributes posted during the first week after Fred Roger’s death. Michael Casey and Aimee Rowe (1996) sought the rhetorical vision of Father Charles E.

Coughlin through an analysis of his weekly radio sermons. Charles J. O' Fahey discovered the rhetorical vision of John Ireland in his St. Patrick's Day Orations (1975).

Other scholars have used fantasy theme analysis to find rhetorical vision in a myriad of other areas. Marsha Vanderford Doyle (1985) used the fantasy theme analysis to look into the rhetoric of romance. Jolene Koester discerned rhetorical visions of women managers (1982). Rita C. Hubbard applied the method of fantasy theme analysis to examine the rhetorical visions of male/female relationship styles in popular romance novels (1985). Thomas G. Endres sought to discover the rhetorical visions of unmarried mothers (1989). Leigh Arden Ford scrutinized the rhetoric of the Big Book, the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous utilizing fantasy theme analysis (1989).

Methodological Approach

After 11 September, 2001, Afghan women suddenly gained a high visibility all over the world. Much of the relevant literature speaks to the fact that Afghan women have been portrayed in the Western news media as oppressed, powerless victims of terrorists, who have no agency in shaping their lives. However, the question remains as to how Afghan women are represented through fictional narratives, which plays an important role in constructing perception of the world.

Against such a backdrop, Bormann's fantasy theme analysis will be employed to find answers to the three research questions set forth at the beginning of this thesis:

RQ1: what are the fantasy themes identified within the novel?

RQ2: what is the emergent rhetorical vision(s) within the novel?

RQ3: how are the emergent fantasy themes chained out among the Western readers?

There are justifications as to why this method has been selected in this study. One reason could be the persuasive function of the novel. Perhaps the most important reason to view *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as rhetoric is that Khalid Hosseini succeeds to persuade readers, which is largely evident in the high magnitude of book reviews on this novel and massive range of readers. From the words of Williams (1987), fantasy theme analysis “attempts to get at the heart of motivation and persuasion” (p. 19). This method helps critics unearth the force of stories and dramatic elements that operate like stories. As argued earlier, the importance of accomplishing this study lies in the fact that readers may be persuaded by the information set forth by the novels, and they may harbour some thoughts about Afghan women via this body of information. On this account, the fantasy theme approach serves an appropriate model to evaluate the novel that will be examined in the present study because this method provides insight into the persuasive function of stories.

Moreover, this method has been successfully used in many studies. Among those that have dealt with portrayals of individuals and group of people are studies by Aden (1986), Casey and Rowe (1996), O’Fahey (1975), Endres (1989), and Koester (1982). Importantly, Foss and Littlejohn (1996) employed fantasy theme criticism to analyse the movie *the day after*, directed by Nicholas Meyer (1983), to identify the rhetorical vision of nuclear war and the way in which this vision corresponds with that of the personal discourses. By the same token, Cooper (1991) used fantasy theme criticism to analyse the book *Out of Africa*, authored by Isak Dinesen (1937), with the goal of understanding any relationship between the written and film texts and the people’s experience of the movie. Therefore, these studies show the strength and applicability of fantasy theme criticism as a rhetorical method and its fitness to the purpose of this study. Given

the goal of this study, Fantasy theme analysis seems to be both a viable and through method in approaching how an idea can successfully translate into the larger social world.

On the other hand, while the rhetorical power of novels has been documented (Wolf, 1973), the reviewed examples of studies in which fantasy theme analysis has been applied speak to the fact that this method has been inadequately utilized in examining novels and discerning themes and rhetorical visions entrenched in them. Hence, this study would be an attempt to contribute to the progressive discourse of the application of fantasy theme analysis method in this domain. As such, Bormann's fantasy theme analysis method has been selected to dissect *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and detect the themes and rhetorical vision(s) of Afghan women embedded in this novel.

Along the same line, there are justifications as to why discourse analysis, close textual analysis, or even narrative criticism would be arguably less efficient or relevant in the context of this study. In discourse analysis, text is the data and the approach is not about exploring the content or meaning of the text. Rather it is about explaining how certain things came to be said or done (Dijk, 1997). The questions that may be asked in discourse analysis approach include "why this said, and not that? Why these words? And where do the connotations of the words fit with different ways of talking about the world" (Cheek, 2004, p. 1145). Thus, texts are interrogated to uncover the unspoken and unstated assumptions implicit within them that have shaped the very form of the text in the first place. Therefore, this approach is appropriate when the aim of the research is to find new sources of knowledge, rather than testing the existing sample (Cheek, 2004). As such, this approach may not be an appropriate one for the purpose of this study.

Of the rhetorical criticism approaches, close textual analysis and narrative criticism seem to be fit to this study. However, there are explanations as to why they would be less relevant to the purpose of this research. Close textual analysis studies the relationship between the inner workings of public discourse and its historical context in order to discover what makes a particular text function persuasively. In practical terms, close textual analysis aims to reveal and explicate the precise, often hidden, mechanisms that give a particular text artistic unity and rhetorical effect (Burghardt, 2005). For example, Michal Leff applied close textual analysis to analyse the central importance of time as a rhetorical element in “Dimensions of Temporality in Lincoln’s Second Inaugural” (Burghardt, 2005, p. 563). Hence, this approach is most appropriate when the aim of the study is to find out the grounds of the persuasive function of a text rather than exploring how a text contributes to a social reality.

Narrative criticism, On the other hand, lays extensive focus on stories and their communication function. On this account, this approach may seem to be fit to the purpose of the study. However, narrative criticism is basically focused on the construction of the narrative. The researcher may make judgements about the quality of the story (Burghardt, 2005). The significant features of a narrative that emerge from analysis may suggest explanations of the narrative that turn into questions about how the construction of a narrative directs the interpretation of a situation, what a narrative reveals about an individual’s identify, or an assessment of the narrative (Foss, 2004). For example, Ryan Bruss analysed the film *Toy Story 2*, directed by John Lasseter (1999), to answer the question “what are the narrative strategies used to construct the gender roles in the film” (Foss, 2004, p. 333). As such, the focus of the narrative criticism is the role of narrative in creating perceptions, while this study considers the novel as an outlet through which readers have access to the body of information.

Procedure.

Fantasy theme analysis (Foss, 1996) involves five steps. The first step requires critics to determine if a fantasy theme exists. One way to establish a fantasy theme's existence is to look for the repeated ideas or themes found in the media, organizations, social movements, or in the speeches of public figures. However, Williams (1987) suggests that a repetitive drama within a particular speech or piece of rhetoric would be sufficient to support the claim that fantasy theme exists. He remarks that critics could mention the other rhetorical events in which the drama appeared to support their claim that fantasy theme does indeed exist.

A second step requires coding the themes within the artifact into one of three categories: setting, character, or action. After the themes are categorized, they are divided into major and minor themes, as the third step of the criticism. Major themes are those appearing most frequently, and they are used to derive the rhetorical vision. In the fourth step, the rhetorical vision(s) should be identified based on the themes. Finally, critics should determine whether or not the fantasy themes discovered in the artifact become chained out into the larger spectrum of public readers through the mass media.

Williams (1987) in his article "Fantasy Theme Analysis; Theory vs. Practice" lends more insight into meaning of *chaining out*. He states that the extent to which a drama is known in the community at large indicates that the themes have been chained out. Echoing a similar train of thought, Jasinski (2001) states that when themes are "circulated, revised, and/or elaborated by other members of the group," group fantasizing occurs (p. 248) and fantasy themes are chained out.

Concerning the employed novel in this study, presenting various book reviews by distinguished publications like Kirkus, New York Times, Guardian, and Publisher Weekly

provides a good indication of the significance of the novel among the Western readers.

Furthermore, recognition of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as best sellers and high readership of the novel among the Western readers indicates that the novel is largely known in the Western community.

However, attempting to show if the fantasy themes have spread out into the larger community in order to become a shared reality and to determine if group fantasizing occurs, the researcher chose to analyse the reviews posted in an online forum where users commented on the meanings and themes lodged in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

To select the reviews convenience sampling will be used in this study. In convenience sampling, the researcher simply selects those people who are convenient to him or her as respondents. This can be a major disadvantage of this type of sampling because it cannot guarantee that all eligible units have an equal chance of being included in the sample. Moreover, it is impossible to tell to what degree the sample is representative of the population. Nevertheless, communication research often relies on convenience sampling because in some cases, using a convenience sample is the only way to gain access to the desired population (Keyton, 2006). By the same token, convenience sampling will be used in this study because several specific characteristics are required from the book reviews in order to contribute to the research goals. The population of interest embodies 22,965 users of googlereads.com website who posted book reviews on *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. This website is selected in this study for the high magnitude of the users of the website. To select a sample of population, the researcher started from the first entry to the point that she reached a saturation point where the themes were repeated and the researcher did not come up with new themes. In order to qualify for this study, the book reviews had to meet the following criteria: a) they were written in English; b) they

ranged from 2007 to 2011. The novel was released in 2007 and the current study has been conducted in 2011. This is the reason as to why the reviews range within these years; and c) they were identified as Western readers owing to some indications of their background. Some examples of these identifications include their mentioning of their residence such as country, city or province; their mentioning of their nationality; and categorizing themselves as Westerners. Following are some examples as to how the selected book reviewers represent themselves being from a Western society:

[Reading the novel] makes me feel a significant amount of personal shame given how intertwined the country has been with the history of the U.S. over the last 30 years; It [the novel] describes conditions and situations which those of us living in the comfort of 21st century America cannot comprehend; I came to appreciate my freedoms as an American more deeply than ever before; I think all Americans need to read this book, as it helps to understand and sympathize with what the people in Afghanistan have gone through; I know I take my freedom as an American woman for granted. If things like that happened here in America we'd all be sharpening our shovels.

Although in most cases, they represented themselves as Americans, there were other reviewers who categorized themselves as Westerners. Therefore, the researcher preferred to use “Western readers” rather than “American readers”.

Rhetorical Artifact

The novel, as a literary genre, emerged in Afghanistan in the early twentieth century. It was a genre imported from the West and introduced through the translation of European works into a culture that already had rich literary traditions, particularly in storytelling (Bezhan, 2006).

It is important to note that in the post-2001 period, most prominent novels about Afghanistan and Afghan people – which are few in numbers – have been authored abroad. Among these novels, novels written about women are scarce. Of these novels, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is selected to be examined. The goal is to discern the rhetorical vision(s) of Afghan women embedded in the novel. The following book reviews provide an indication of significance of the novel.

***A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini (2007).**

Overview.

The story covers three decades of anti-Soviet jihad, civil war, and Taliban tyranny through the lives of two women. Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of a prosperous Herat businessman. Banished to a small hovel outside of town, Mariam and her mother live in impoverished seclusion. Mariam's father makes periodic visits bearing gifts and visions of a wider world. Mariam comes to idolize her father, though her mother warns repeatedly against trusting him.

Mariam's childhood ends abruptly when her mother hangs herself. Her father then marries off the 15-year-old to Rashid, a 40-year-old shoemaker in Kabul. Rashid is a deeply conventional man who insists that Mariam wears a burqa, though many women are going uncovered. For a time, the marriage seems to be taking hold, but soon enough Rashid's brutish nature emerges after numerous miscarriages suffered by Mariam.

Parallel to Mariam's story is that of Laila, the beautiful, vivacious 14-year-old daughter of a schoolteacher father who dreams of going to California. Laila lives a life filled with books, schooling, and hope for the future. However, as the war ravages Kabul and her parents are killed by a rocket, the two storylines emerge. Mariam is outraged that this beautiful teenager has wormed her way into her household. However, when the baby arrives Mariam becomes

enchanted with the child and gradually softens toward the mother. The story of these two women reaches its climax in an act of extraordinary generosity and self-sacrifice of Mariam.

Book review.

A Thousand Splendid Suns, released on 2007, May 22, received favourable prepublication reviews from Kirkus, Publishers Weekly, Library Journal, Booklist, Washington Post, New York Times, Houston Chronicle, and Guardian. It reached number 2 on Amazon.com's bestseller list before its release. Furthermore, Khalid Hosseini is the author of *Kite Runner*, which was an international bestseller, selling more than 12 million copies worldwide (Kakutani, 2007).

Guardian (2007) in "Behind the Veil" remarks that the horror of rockets, attempted escapes, beatings, and threats reflected in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* make up the Afghan women's daily experiences in the real world although they may render the novel too melodramatic. In this novel, Khalid Hosseini does not challenge the usual Western view of Afghanistan, but he provides more insights into this Western perception by adding greater knowledge and understanding to it.

Julie Foster (2007) in *Publisher Weekly Review* points out that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the painful and at times violent, yet ultimately hopeful story of two women's inner lives. The author's bewitching narrative captures the intimate details of life in a world where it's a struggle to survive and skilfully inserts this human story into the larger backdrop of recent history. Furthermore, she states that the novel gives a better understanding of the effects of cultural vandalism by the Taliban, which shattered Afghanistan's art and culture. It provides more insight into the devastating impacts of Shariat law on women's lives.

Jonathan Yardley (2007) in *Washington Post Review* asserts that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is powerfully moving. He reminds that this novel is popular fiction of the first rank, which

is plenty good enough, but it is not literature and should not be mistaken for such. The central theme of the novel is the place of women in Afghanistan. It is the story of two women intertwined with the chaotic history of Afghanistan. Like a historian or journalist, he adds, Khalid Hosseini carefully provides dates for all of the historical events, which seems a bit out of place in a work of fiction. However, it will be useful to American readers who know little about Afghanistan where every Afghan story is marked by death, loss, and unimaginable grief, yet where people find a way to survive. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is, for all its shortcomings, a brave, honourable, big-hearted book.

John Freeman (2007), the reviewer for the *Houston Chronicle*, reflects that Khalid Hosseini tells a carefully observed story about his country through the eyes of two Afghan women, who are buffeted by forces of history from 1974 to the present. The author of the novel proved himself a natural if occasionally outspoken storyteller. He is enormously skilled at tugging at readers' heartstrings. He may not be lyrical writer, but he draws details well, which helps render his characters' plight in human terms.

Kakutani (2007), the reviewer for the *New York Times*, points to the ability of the novel in providing readers with an intimate look at Afghanistan and the difficulties of life there and in showing off the author's accessible and very old-fashioned storytelling talents. He particularly highlights the authors' taste for melodramatic plotlines, sharply drawn, black-and-white characters and elemental bold-faced emotions. From his viewpoint, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the story of mothers and daughters and friendship between women. He further delineates how the novel starts off programmatically and gains speed and emotional power as it slowly unfurls.

Finally, *Kirkus* (2007) reviews the novel as an artistic triumph and sure-fire bestseller for its fearless writer. The article highlights that despite all the pain and heartbreak, the novel is

never depressing; “Hosseini barrels through each grim development unflinchingly, seeking illumination” (Para. 2).

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology applied to conduct the present study. By discussing fantasy theme analysis, review of fantasy theme analysis research, methodological approach, procedure, and justifications for the rhetorical artifact employed in this study a clear understanding of the research design and the methodology has been uncovered. By describing the specific methodological tool the chapter provided a justification for employing fantasy theme analysis. Consulting upon the suggestions put forth by Williams (1987) and Foss (1996) and bearing in mind the nature of the current study and the research questions, the steps to take when conducting the fantasy theme analysis were maintained.

In the following chapter, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* will be analysed to find out the themes and the rhetorical visions. Moreover, the selected book reviews on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* will be examined employing fantasy theme analysis to bring to light how the portrayals of Afghan women within the novel have been chained out among the readers in this study.

Chapter 4: Application of Fantasy Theme Analysis

The fantasy theme analysis in this study is conducted in four steps. First, the researcher applied the concepts of Bormann's (1972) fantasy theme analysis to a critical examination of Khalid Hosseini's novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The second step is a fantasy theme analysis of a sample of relevant book reviews. Then, the study discusses the relevant relationship between the fantasy themes found in the novel and those that emerged from the book reviews to find out how the themes are chained out among the Western readers in this study. The last step ends with finding the ways in which the rhetorical vision of Afghan women within the novel corresponds to that represented by the Western mass media.

Fantasy Theme Analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Three fantasy themes came to light during the analysis of the Khalid Hussein's novel: sufferance, self-sacrifice, and inferiority. In order to provide a context for the fantasy themes, this study will first describe the related themes of setting, character, and action within the novel. Throughout the exploration of the setting, character, and action themes together with the fantasy themes, whenever possible, Khalid Hosseini's wording within the novel has been paraphrased. However, his dramatic descriptions best illustrate the conflict between the heroes and the villains and the dominant tone of the scenes. Hence, the researcher chose to include some fairly lengthy quotes from the novel during this phase of analysis to provide a better understanding of dramas.

Setting theme.

Statements telling where the drama between the characters takes place and/or describing the tone of the scenes are characterized as setting themes (Bormann, 1985). Two different but overlapping settings appear throughout the novel. The foreground setting is Kabul where

Hosseini chronicles the last 33 years of the Afghanistan's tumultuous history of war and depression. He relates the Communist era as "a good time to be a woman in Afghanistan" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 135); He tells of the advent of the Mujahedin and their skirmish over power: "Insults were hurled. Fingers pointed. Accusations flew. Meetings were angrily called off and doors slammed. The city held its breath. In the mountains, loaded magazines snapped into Kalashnikovs;" he describes the people "as helpless as old Santiago watching the sharks take bites out of his prize fish" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 174).

Hosseini further gives an account of the Taliban's emergence, of their background as young Pashtun men whose families had fled to Pakistan during the war against the Soviets, and of their incentive to be a Talib. He narrates how they tear down the country, shut down universities, rip paintings from walls, kick down television screens, burn books, and close down book stores. He illustrates how they strip women of their very basic rights of working, educating, going outside without a male relative, and showing their faces. Hosseini, then, provides a quick glimpse of Kabul after the USA attack on September 11, 2001. He tells of the schools built, roads repaved, and women returning to work.

The setting of Kabul provides readers with a broader view of the circumstances of women in the context of political instability of Afghanistan. It demonstrates the author's effort to place emphasis on the compelling contribution of the political fluctuation of the country to the violent suppression of women. On this note, the importance of the setting of Kabul lies in its taking part in constructing the character and action themes. Moreover, providing an authentic account of the political reality in Afghanistan serves to reinforce the persuasive function of the novel owing to the fact that readers are more apt to perceive the novel as an educational text rather than a fiction.

The second setting is the sadistic air dominating the house where most of the scenarios are acted out by the characters. The violence and the horror prevalent in Kabul is understood to be analogous to the brutal, male dominance overshadowing the house. The fear crawls into the life of Mariam from the inception of her marriage when Rashid asks her “You’re shaking. Maybe I scare you. Do I scare you? Are you frightened of me?” and “she quickly shook her head in what she recognized as her first lie in their marriage” (Hosseini, 2007, pp. 60-61). Her life is further haunted by the fear over the years. After four years of marriage, she perceives “how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 99). She always lives in fear of Rashid’s shifting moods and his volatile temperament that he often resolves with scorn, abuse, and punch. As the novel makes its way, Rashid’s sadistic treatment of her wives allows the author to potently illustrate the ferocious setting of the house. One instance of his brutality is well displayed in his violent treatment of his wives when they are apprehended after their failed effort to run away from home: “she [Laila] was being dragged by the hair. Hair was ripped from Laila’s scalp, and her eyes watered with pain.” Then, Laila watches Rashid “leading Mariam across the yard by the nape of her neck. Mariam was barefoot and doubled over. There was blood on his hands, blood on Mariam’s face, her hair, down her neck and back” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 269). He imprisons them in two separate empty, dark rooms:

Azan rang out a second time and still Rashid had not given them any food and, worse, no water... the room turned into a pressure cooker... The muezzin called azan a third time. Again the heat... Laila was sure now that Aziza, [her daughter], would die in this heat, and Laila would have to lie beside her stiffening little body and wait for her own death.” (Hosseini, 2007, pp. 270-271)

The second emerging setting within the novel, the sadistic air dominating the house, allows readers to perceive the violence embedded in the routine of everyday lives of Afghan women. Placing the focus on both settings provides an ample lens that permits the analytical gaze to penetrate into the grounds of the characters' suffering and perceive how different sources of violence in national and personal levels are interrelated. Hence, the settings of the novel function to construct a backdrop against which the fantasy themes come to light.

Character theme.

Statements describing the characters (i.e., dramatic personae) within the drama are defined as character themes (Bormann, 1985). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, two character themes are dominant: villains and heroes. Selecting heroes is a central activity involved in the creation of fantasy themes because these characters provide the dramatic tension that animate struggles between good and evil (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991). Audiences are attracted to heroic personae and feel an antipathy toward negative characters. These responses arouse emotions and generate the involvement of audiences in the story (Bormann, 1985). By describing the suppression Laila and Mariam undergo and their large capacity for love and endurance, the author represents Mariam and Laila as heroes. Likewise, describing the characters who generate domination and threaten the heroes with violence permits the author to develop the villains. As such, within the novel, Rashid, war, and the patriarchal society represent the villains.

In the novel, the villains engage in gender violence and expand their domination over the heroes. At home, Rashid's reproaches, ridicules, reprimands, kicks, and fists rain down on Mariam and Laila. After so many years, Mariam still shivers with fright when she is exposed to the outrage of Rashid. It is "the fear of the goat, released in the tiger's cage, when the tiger first

looks up from its paws, begins to growl” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 240). Outdoors is a male domain where war shows no mercy to fragile femininity. Mariam and Laila very often hear of women who kill themselves out of fear of being raped. Laila, accused of not accompanied by a male chaperon, more than often, encounters the bloody taste of the Taliban’s wooden clubs, whips, and fists. Save Rashid and war, the society manifests an opposing standpoint against the heroes. Mariam is an illegitimate girl who struggles to get away from her shameful secrets of her past and to shake off the scolding cast of the society. By the same token, Laila endeavours to conceal her contemptible marriage to Rashid that mocks her superb past. Interestingly, the burqa, for both Mariam and Laila, yields protection against the accusing look of the society. Laila finds some comfort in the anonymity that the burqa provides for her, and Mariam feels buffered from the scrutinizing eyes of strangers. Owing to the sanctuary provided by the burqa, they do not worry about the penetrating gaze of the people who seek to unearth their disgraceful past and shameful present.

Mariam and Laila are perceived as heroes on account of how they tolerate and endure the brutality of the villains, how they manage to develop a sense of unity with one another, and how they act heroically to grant comfort to each other and to the children. Mariam’s empathizing with Laila when she falls from grace due to the pregnancy is one example. Mariam’s feeling does not convey a sense of vindication toward a rival. In reverse, she, surprisingly, finds herself empathizing with Laila. The endurance and the compassion demonstrated by the heroes as their coping response to the pervasive suppression will be further elaborated as the argument unfolds within the fantasy themes.

The secondary heroes (i.e. supporting players) embody the actions and values of the heroes (Bormann, 1985). In the novel, the secondary heroes are Afghan women, who are

displayed in the same circumstance of the heroes. Included in the secondary heroes are equally Laila's father who seeks Laila's happiness in education; the orphanage manager who shelters the orphans, keeps them off the streets, and educates them in the face of punitive interdiction imposed by the Taliban; Tariq who loves Laila and demonstrates commitment to his love and his responsibility for her; and Mariam's mother, Nana, who painfully shoulders the disgrace of being illicitly pregnant and the burden of her father's complete abandonment of her.

Drawing on the actions performed by the secondary heroes is important due to their contribution to providing a list of more salient themes within the novel. Consulting more examples within the novel allows postulating the themes and visions and lends more grounds for validating the themes.

Action theme.

Action themes (i.e., plotline) delineate the dramatic conflict between the heroes and the villains (Bormann, 1985). As was unfolded during the discussion of the setting and the character themes and will become more evident during the discussions of the fantasy themes, the violence and domination the heroes endure at the hands of the villains and the love and sacrifice that the heroes demonstrate is salient within the novel. The dominant plotline laid out in the novel, thus, embodies the coping response of the heroes against the oppression engendered by the villains.

Owing to the villains' conspiracy, Mariam and Laila turn to be more suppressed. The fear of being raped and murdered at the hands of the Mujahedin and the fear of being abused and tortured at the hands of the Taliban grow their dependence on Rashid and enable him to expand his aggressive dominion. On the other hand, the patriarchal ideology of male dominance and female subordination in a traditional society allows Rashid to be even more of a villain. In return,

the dominant coping response of the heroes is acceptance. They both yield to a cruel married life. Laila gives up her ambitions and concedes to the contemptible life with Rashid. Mariam accepts her cruel, barren life with no objection. In response to Laila who objects to the aggressive air of the household, Mariam says that “this is *your* household now. You ought to get used to it” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 249). One strong example of her acceptance of the brutal domination is well displayed in the author’s description of her being abused by her husband: when Rashid batters her, “the proceeding is always the same. There is no cursing, no screaming, no pleading, and no surprised yelps. There is only the systematic business of beating and being beaten” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 268). However, they infrequently demonstrate resistance to the ferocious dominance. On occasion, Laila stands up to Rashid’s demands and violence. Their effort to run away from home is another example of their objection to the imposed suppression. By the same token, Mariam’s ultimate decision to terminate her husband’s life manifests her resistance.

It is important, however, to note that the heroes’ acceptance and resistance as two alternative coping responses to the domination are inspired by love and compassion. Their love for the children and their compassion for one another endow them with enough strength and resilience to endure the adversity. Thus, the sanctioning agent, the source that justifies the rhetorical drama, was diagnosed as love and compassion. Their decision to accept or resist the violence is for the most part contingent on their care and concern for others. More details with supporting instances will be provided within the discussions of the fantasy themes. From these character, action, and setting themes, three fantasy themes emerged: sufferance, sacrifice, and inferiority. The next section provides descriptions of these fantasy themes that underlie *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Fantasy theme of sufferance.

Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Khalid Hosseini (2007, p. 7)

The theme of sufferance is prevalent in the lives of the heroes. To support the argument, the researcher brings up two major sources of victimizing the heroes within the novel: patriarchy and war.

The patriarchal structure of the society is a dominant source of violence and suffering within the novel. Forced marriage is one of them (Borer, 2009). Having lost her mother, Mariam yields to her father's desire and marries a man who is twenty five years older than her. Likewise, Laila is obliged to marry Rashid because the patriarchal structure of the society does not allow her to bear a child out of wedlock. She is well informed that her daughter as an illegitimate child will suffer from the scolding glimpse of the society as Mariam went through the same adversity during her life.

Another product of the patriarchal structure of the society is *patriarchal terrorism* (Piispa, 2002). The term patriarchal terrorism, conceived by Johnson (1995), is the terrorist control of wives by husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence but also financial subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics. Owing to the patriarchal structure of the society, the heroes of the novel fall victim to the patriarchal terrorism. In their everyday lives, Mariam and Laila experience divergent forms of violence such as scold, scorn, threat, and physical violence. In one instance, Mariam wears little make-up for the first time in her life, but her husband's distaste gaze at her face makes her disparately feel contrite. In another instance, Rashid heaps scorn on Mariam and calls her an illegitimate village girl whose considerable quality is to be "a good worker without pretensions" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 222). He often throws the food at Mariam when it has not been prepared exactly to his taste. One night, he

forces her to put a handful of pebbles into her mouth as a punishment for not preparing the food to his taste: “He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it, urged her to chew it” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 104).

The burden of procreative blame embodies another feature of patriarchy (Inhorn, 1996). In a patriarchal society, women gain respect and power by producing a son for the family. In light of the same ideology, women experience procreative blame for reproductive failing or producing only daughters (Inhorn, 1996; Mann 1986). When Mariam fails to have a child, her husband grows more resentful. He always finds an excuse to maltreat her. No matter how thoroughly she submits to his wants and demands, she is no more than a “house cat” for Rashid (Hosseini, 2007, p. 98). Laila, whose first child is a daughter, experiences the same ill treatment. Rashid overtly expresses his anger of having a daughter while accompanying her to the house from the hospital:

He let the gate go prematurely, and it almost hit the girl on the face. He crossed the yard in a few, quick steps.... the front door to the house opened. From the hallway, Mariam saw the girl, a swaddled bundle in the hook of her left arm. She had one foot outside, the other inside, against the door, to prevent it from springing shut. She was stooped over and was grunting, trying to reach for the paper bag of belongings that she had put down in order to open the door. Her face was grimacing with effort. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 236)

When Rashid talks about Laila’s daughter, he calls her a thing: “sometimes, I swear, sometimes I want to put that thing in a box and let her float down Kabul River. Like baby Moses” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 237). Other instances within the novel potently represent the girl as an unwanted being in a strong patriarchal society. For example, one day, Mariam, trying to

convince Laila that the burden of her sterility and that of Laila's bearing girl is the same in the eyes of Rashid, says to Laila that her sin is even less forgivable than that of Laila because she gave him a daughter. In another instance, talking about their child, Rashid stubbornly insists that his child is a boy and he will name him Zalmai, and finally he says to Mariam that "if it's a girl, and it isn't, but, if it *is* a girl, then you can choose whatever name you want" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 87).

Sense of male ownership embodies another aspect of the patriarchy (Piispa, 2002). The role of Rashid as a possessor and the corresponding role of Mariam and Laila as possession is dominant within the novel. In one scene where Rashid talks about modern men and their treatment of their wives, he apprises Mariam that seeing the men who have no control over their wives is embarrassing for him. He forewarns her that where he comes from, a woman's face is only her husband's business. Sense of male ownership further receives more emphasis throughout the novel. In another instance, Rashid tries to make Laila aware of his responsibility for guarding her honour as a husband, and in return, he warns her to avoid leaving the house without his company. By the same token, when Rashid and Mariam go out, Rashid greets his friend, while Mariam stands a few feet away. Rashid does not introduce her to his friends. Male control and limiting of the women's living space, as Piispa (2002) claims, are prominent in the patterns of a patriarchal society.

Not only economic dependence, but also unsafe outside world resulting from war and patriarchy do not allow the heroes to leave the violent relationship. The patriarchal structure of the society permits Rashid to take up the role of perpetrator and in turn, renders Mariam and Laila victim. As became evident during the discussion of fantasy theme of sufferance, women are degraded and brutalized in a patriarchal society, while male perpetrators are not held

accountable for victimizing. They are not blamed because the authorities of the society are not committed to preventing it (Hunnicut, 2009). In one instance, Rashid gives warning to Laila that if, one day, he goes to the Taliban and tells them of his suspicions about her, they will unquestionably believe him and mete out severe punishment for her. Mariam and Laila are well apprised that in the eyes of the Taliban, Najibullah, as a communist and the leader of the dreaded KHAD, is “only slightly more contemptible than a woman” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 279). Hence, not only war begets violence and brutality within the world outside, but it also reinforces the violence inside the household. Mariam and Laila hear of men “who, in the name of honour, would kill their wives or daughters if they’d been raped by the militia” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 253). The fear of being raped and tortured at the hands of the Mujahidin and the Taliban severely limits Mariam and Laila’s movement. Hence, at home, Rashid exercises his male dominance and power, and, outdoors, Mariam and Laila are barely visible.

Against such a backdrop, the anti-feminine facet of war and different aspects of patriarchy including forced marriage, patriarchal terrorism, the burden of procreative blame, and the sense of male ownership constitute gender violence and domination over women (Borer, 2009; Hunnicut, 2009; Inhorn, 1996; Johnson, 1995; Piispa, 2002). Acceptance, as the dominant coping response of the heroes, conveys the heroes’ passivity. As such, they are not perceived as acting heroically when they accept their fate and submit to it. Rather, their victimage is highly reinforced because the villains coalesce to render them more invisible in the context of Afghan society and cause them to be more oppressed and dependent in the private sphere of the family. On the other hand, their heroic action is revealed when they resist to domination. However, their resistance is most often inspired by their devotion and compassion.

Fantasy theme of self-sacrifice.

Sometimes the shifting of rocks is deep, deep below the earth, and it's powerful and scary down there, but that all we feel on the surface is a slight tremor. Only a slight tremor.

Khalid Hosseini (2007, p. 323)

Another dominant fantasy theme emerging within the novel is self-sacrifice. In the feminist literature, self sacrifice is characterized as mother's "losing" herself in caring for others (H. M. Bahr & Bahr, 2001, p. 1234). However, in addition to the maternalistic sense of caring and loving, the sense of empathy was determined as the source of self-sacrifice within the novel.

Maternal devotion of the heroes is salient throughout the novel. Laila is well conscious that her marriage to Rashid is dishonourable, disingenuous, shameful, and spectacularly unfair to Mariam. However, she devotes her virtue to her child, and what's more, she knowingly yields to a vicious married life. By marrying Rashid, she chooses to give her daughter a protective name of father and hence, rescue her from being repudiated by the society as an illegitimate girl. However, Rashid's treatment of her child grows ill. That the child is a *girl* incepts his outrage, but suspecting that the child is not *his own* fuels his ill temper. To shield her child against his resentment, she often takes risk skirmishing with Rashid over her daughter, while the consequence is not always confined to kicking, strangling, and assaulting.

In one instance, Laila, resisting Rashid's decision to send her daughter begging, punches her husband. It is the first time in her life that she strikes anybody. Laila hits Rashid so hard that it sounds like dropping a rice bag on the floor. In return, Rashid wraps his hands around her throat, lifts her off the ground, and slams her against the wall. Finally, their skirmish ends up with the barrel of the gun shoved into the mouth of Laila.

Nevertheless, poverty, hunger, and Rashid's ill temper coalesce to strip her of her daughter. She gives up struggling and sends Aziza, Laila's daughter, off to the orphanage. After

a while, Rashid desists from accompanying Laila to the orphanage. However, her maternal longing to see Aziza leads Laila to hazard her life and face to the perils of the Taliban lurking everywhere outdoors. She is most often maltreated and punished by the Taliban in case spotted alone in the street. One day, a young Talib batters Laila with a radio antenna, gives a whack to the back of her neck and says, "I see you again, I'll beat you until your mother's milk leaks out of your bones"(Hosseini, 2007, p. 321). Most often, she trudges home with bloody legs and arms "feeling like a stupid, pitiable animal" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 321).

Nana's, Mariam's mother, sacrifice is another manifestation of maternal devotion within the novel. Nana, stigmatized for illegitimate intercourse with Jalil, endures the shame of bearing a bastard and shapes her life around the task of raising Mariam. She chooses to live somewhere detached, "where neighbours wouldn't stare at her belly, point at her, snicker, or, worse yet, assault her with insincere kindnesses" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 9). Although she can give Mariam away, she devotes her grace and life to bringing up an illegitimate child under the scolding, penetrating eyes of the society.

Sense of empathy constitutes another facet of the fantasy theme of sacrifice. The relationship between Mariam and Laila commences with a sense of rivalry. In the eyes of Mariam, Laila is a rival who worms her way into her life. However, the initial empathic understanding is triggered in their first spoken encounter when Laila finally breaks her stony silence and puts her suffering into words. They both have gone through the same pain of feeling guilty about their parents' death. Uttering her pains and sorrows, Laila expects some words of comfort. However, Mariam already knows that no word can console her suffering. She remembers the day they found Nana dangling from the tree and how little comfort she found

when Mullah Faizullah quoted the Koran for her. Going through the same agony, she is well conscious that no word can ease her burden.

The empathy between the heroes of the novel further receives more emphasis when Mariam concedes to Rashid's marriage to Laila. Mariam initially struggles against her husband's decision for a second marriage. However, her final response is silence when Rashid begins to describe a pathetic destiny for Laila upon her leaving. "She won't get far. No food, no water, not a rupiah in her pockets, rockets flying everywhere. How many days do you suppose she'll last before she's abducted, raped, or tossed into some roadside ditch with her throat slit?" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 15) Mariam's silence, indeed, manifests her empathy with Laila and her determination of accepting a rival who will share her husband and her household forever. Nevertheless, the empathy gradually produces emotional consonance between Mariam and Laila and creates a supportive atmosphere for both. They shield each other against the fists and kicks of Rashid. In a skirmish between Laila and Rashid over his being fired from work, Rashid begins to batter Laila: "[Rashid] pushed Laila to the ground, and began kicking her, Mariam threw herself on Laila, he went on kicking, kicking Mariam now... kicking until he couldn't anymore" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 305). In another instance, Rashid, outraged by Laila's resistance to his sexual desire, accuses Mariam of corrupting Laila. He threatens Mariam to give her a whipping when Laila appears and struggles to stop Rashid's progress toward Mariam. She finally yields to his demand and retrieves a safe night for Mariam.

The ultimate manifestation of love, sacrifice, and compassion is displayed in Mariam's struggle to rescue Laila from the menacing anger of Rashid when he learns that Laila met her ex-boyfriend, Tariq. Mariam struggles to uncurl Rashid's finger wrapped around Laila's neck, but she fails. Then she hits him across the temple with a shovel. However, she knows that if she lets

him walk now, he will be back with his gun. If she was certain that “he would be satisfied with shooting only her, that there was a chance he would spare Laila, she might have dropped the shovel, but in Rashid’s eyes she saw murder for them both” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 349). Hence, Mariam makes up her mind. She raises the shovel as high as she could and brings it down. She further takes charge of murdering her husband to grant a secured life to Laila and Aziza. At the last moments of her life, when she gets prepared to be shot, she thinks “she is leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian, a mother, a person of consequence at last. No, it was not sad” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 370).

Thus, resistance as a coping response to domination is manifest in the heroes’ self-sacrifice and their struggle to change the others’ lives for the better. Although they very often submit to domination, their love and care for others lead them to occasionally resist against the violence. In this regard, Mariam and Laila are perceived as acting heroically. However, the agentic behaviour, the capacity to act (Korteweg, 2008), of the heroes is restricted to their innate, feminine strength and resilience as mother. As a matter of fact, their common, strong sense of motherhood helps to obliterate their sense of detachment and rivalry and underlies their sense of connection. As such, although the heroes occasionally demonstrate agentic behaviour, it does not go beyond their maternalistic sense of responsibility. One strong example in this regard is the concluding scene of the novel where Laila greets the students in the orphanage as their teacher:

When the children spot Laila, they come running. They come running at full tilt. Laila is swarmed. There is a flurry of high-pitched greetings, of shrill voices, of patting, clutching, tugging, groping, of jostling with one another to climb into her arms. There are outstretched hands and appeals for attention. Some of them call her *Mother*. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 412)

Although the author portrays Laila in a non-domestic position for the first time during the novel to represent her contribution to the construction process of the country, her position as a teacher principally reflects her feminine resilience of motherhood rather than her competence and aptitude. Thus, although Mariam and Laila seem to act heroically, their self-sacrifice and resistance fail to challenge their vision of victimage. The heroes' actions indeed underlie their feminine strength, and the theme of victimage remains pervasive.

Fantasy theme of inferiority.

This man's will felt to Mariam as imposing and immovable as the Safid-koh Mountains looming over Gul Daman. Khalid Hosseini (2007, p. 71)

Three related aspects of inferiority figure prominently throughout the novel. The first aspect is related to dependence; the second aspect is concerned with the subordinate position of the heroes; and ignorance is the third aspect of the theme.

The first aspect of the fantasy theme of inferiority is dependence. The heroes' dependence on male is frequently observed throughout the novel. Their dependence on male protection comes into view with the opening lines of the novel. It starts on Thursday. Thursdays are particular days in the tedious life of Mariam. On Thursdays, she feels happiness and deserving of all the beauty and bounty of life owing to the moments she spends with her father, Jalil. Upon his leaving, "she holds her breath and, in her head, counts seconds. She pretends that for each second that she does not breathe, God would grant her another day with Jalil" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 24). Finally, she prefers living with her father rather than staying with her mother. Mariam's dependence over Mullah Faizullah is another instance. It is Mullah Faizullah who teaches Mariam reading, praying, and reciting Koran; who holds her hand and guides the pencil in it along each alphabet. It is easy to tell Mullah Faizullah things that Mariam does not dare tell her

mother. He is the only one who gives her comfort over her mother's death. When she is disappointed in Jalil, she yearns to stay with Mullah Faizullah. Mariam further displays her dependence on Rashid. When Rashid invites his friends, Mariam has to go upstairs to her room and close the door. However, she feels to be treasured and significant by his protectiveness. She believes that her honour is something worth guarding to him.

Likewise, Laila's dependence on male protection is manifest throughout the novel. Her father, Babi, is the first one. He educates her, inspires her to pursue education, tells her of a golden perspective for women, and responds to her emotional needs in lieu of her mother, who is most often mourning for her martyred sons. Tariq is the second man in Laila's life. It is both "lovely and terrible" when she learns that Tariq has a gun to protect her (Hosseini, 2007, p. 176). In another instance, she cries when she learns that he is leaving her. It is "selfish and irrational, but she was furious with him for abandoning her, Tariq, who was like an extension of her, whose shadow sprung beside hers in every memory" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 182).

Finally, Laila and Mariam, every so often, acknowledge their dependence on Rashid's protection. On account of chaos and anarchy engendered by war and the tumultuous state of the country, their dependence on Rashid grows increasingly. In one instance, Rashid, trying to convince Mariam of his marriage to Laila, declares that by marrying Laila he gives her a sanctuary. He tells of the widows sleeping on the streets and killing for having a husband like him, and Mariam concedes owing to the fact that what he says is utterly unvarnished. In another instance, Rashid, being scornful of Laila's education and intelligence, reminds her of how her life is contingent on his mercy as a husband: "what good are all your smarts to you now? What's keeping you off the streets, your smarts or me? Half the women in this city would kill to have a

husband like me” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 83). Laila is well apprised that every word Rashid utters is true.

The subordinate roles of the heroes and the female characters constitute the second feature of inferiority. Mariam and Laila are prominently acting in subordinate traditional roles of parenting and housewifery. Mariam is an uneducated village girl and Laila, in contrast, is an educated city girl, and yet they both have limited roles circumscribed by their domesticity. Together with the heroes, female characters are most portrayed in a domestic setting. When Mariam arrives in Kabul, she catches the first glimpse of women in Kabul “working laundry lines and shoeing their children” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 63). At home, she persistently attempts to demonstrate her domestic commitment. She devotes a lot of time and effort to cleaning, washing, and cooking, and at the end, she is disappointed that her husband pays no heed. When she cooks, all her worries are her husband’s reaction, and when he likes it, “a flare of pride caught her off the guard” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 69). Hence, all her life revolves around pleasing and nurturing her husband. Throughout the novel, there are only two women who hold occupational roles; Laila’s teacher and the doctor who takes up surgery for Laila. Save these two characters, every other woman in the novel is associated with the identifiable maternal roles of wife and mother.

Ignorance is the third aspect of the fantasy theme of inferiority. Within the novel, the male characters are largely associated with knowledge and understanding, while the heroes very often demonstrate their dependence on male’s knowledge. Most often, male characters act as a bridge between the heroes and the world outside. For Mariam and her mother, for instance, the connection to the world outside is Jalil. He is a “proof that there existed a world at large, beyond the kulba, a world of presidents with unpronounceable names, and trains and museums and soccer” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 23). Mariam admires Jalil for “his vast and worldly knowledge”

(Hosseini, 2007, p. 5). Further in the novel, when Mariam settles in Kabul, she finds herself ignorant of the neighbourhood in the first weeks of her living in Rashid's house. One day, on the way back to home, she gets lost. She does not remember which one is Rashid's house. She "ran up then down the street, panting, near tears now, began trying doors blindly and lost on her own street" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 68).

For Laila, Tariq and Babi are the links to the world outside. "Every few weeks, it seemed to Laila, Babi was coming home with news of the latest republic to declare independence..." (Hosseini, 2007, p. 159), and Tariq is the one who tells her of the militiamen stationing in the mountains and shooting civilians down below, of boundaries of each warlord's territory, and of the last raping and looting news by the Mujahedin. Rashid plays the same role for Mariam and Laila. He is their tie to the world outside and even to their close neighbourhood. He tells them of the political instability of the country, of defeats and victories, of unsafe state of streets, and of the neighbours looted and raped.

Accordingly, the patriarchal ideal of male dominance and superiority and female submission and inferiority underlies the representation of the fantasy theme of inferiority. The delineation of the female's ignorance of their environment and their dependence on male's knowledge function to construct an image of female character as inferior and reliant and a corresponding image of male character as self-sufficient and superior. Furthermore, the presentation of the heroes' dependence on male protection conveys an image of male character as strong and protector and female character as dependent and fragile. Likewise, the representation of the heroes' low position relays their subordination and lack of active involvement.

As such, different facets of inferiority including the heroes' dependence on male protection, ignorance, and subordinate position reinforce their sufferance and hence, underlie the vision of victimage. For example, One day, Mariam asks her about the Communists. He shifts his eyes and says: "you know nothing, do you? You're like a child. Your brain is empty. There is no information in it" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 98). In another instance, Rashid, telling of the Taliban as those who know nothing of the world and of the country, scornfully says that Mariam, compared to them, might be a university professor. Indeed, Mariam's ignorance lends more power to Rashid and fuels his violent treatment. On this note, like the other two fantasy themes of sufferance and self-sacrifice, the fantasy theme of inferiority underlies the passivity of Mariam and Laila.

Rhetorical vision of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Combining the themes of sufferance, self-sacrifice, and inferiority within the novel yields two overarching rhetorical visions. The first rhetorical vision is *femininity as the source of strength and the cause of fragility*. Although Mariam and Laila very often accept the life as it is, they sporadically resist the domination. Their resistance is mainly inspired by their maternal sense of love and responsibility and their feminine sentimentalism. Therefore, the agentic behaviour of Mariam and Laila is exclusively reflected in their feminine strength and resilience. Within the novel, they are perceived as strong and brave on account of their femininity.

In contrast, the anti-feminine facet of war and different features of patriarchy including forced marriage, patriarchal terrorism, the burden of procreative blame, and the sense of male ownership perpetrate violence and domination (Borer, 2009; Hunnicut, 2009; Inhorn, 1996; Johnson, 1995; Piispa, 2002). Hence, the patriarchal ideal of female subordination and male

dominance underlies their vision as frail victim of violence. Moreover, their dependence, ignorance, and subordinate position reinforce their fragility against male dominance. As such, the femininity of Afghan women renders them powerless in the strong patriarchal society of Afghanistan.

The second rhetorical vision of Afghan women is an extension of the first: *freedom through protection*. Mariam begins experiencing adversities in her life as soon as she loses the protection of her father and the support of Mullah Faizullah. As long as Laila enjoys the sanctuary of her father and Tariq, life is super. Soon after they disappear from her life, she goes through the same agony as Mariam's. At the end, Tariq comes into view to rescue Laila by taking her to Pakistan and setting up a new life for her. She further decides to come back to Afghanistan and be a part of the peace, construction, and improvement initiated by the U.S. military involvement. The last lines of the novel portrays one of the regular, peaceful days of Laila's life in Kabul when she plays the role of a devoted wife, a caring mother, a loving teacher, and a successful woman whose photo was printed in a newspaper. Laila's happiness is blooming, while the compelling roles of Tariq and the Western military intervention remain salient.

As such, the rhetorical visions of Afghan women emerging from the fantasy themes convey the women's passivity within the context of Afghanistan. Afghan women, within the novel, are construed as the passive victims of war and violence who have no agency in shaping their lives. That Tariq appears like a knight in shining armour to rescue Laila and that the USA finally intervenes and winds up the dismal portion of her life largely reinforce the Afghan women's need for protection. From the author's viewpoint, Afghan women's empowerment and their freedom is contingent on accepting the patriarchal ideology of male as protector. Moreover,

the author places an emphasis on the compelling role of the international involvement in opening a new chapter in the Afghan women's lives.

Fantasy Theme Analysis of Book Reviews

In this section, the fantasy themes embedded in the reviews will be discovered to reduce the bias committed by the researcher and help her hold a more objective position. Researchers often bring their own lens to the study that interests them, and bias often occurs. Central to the fantasy theme analysis is determining whether or not these fantasies become chained out into the larger spectrum of public discourse through mass media. For this research, an online book review forum was selected where individuals could post their reviews of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Selected examples from a variety of book reviews will be analysed and discussed to show how *A Thousand Splendid Suns*' fantasy themes have been chained out among the readers. To this end, convenience sampling has been used (Keyton, 2006). Dominant criteria for selecting the samples include the followings: a) they should be written in English; b) they should have some indications to the users' background as the Western readers; c) they should be posted from 2007 to 2011. In order to identify the statements abstracted from the book reviews, the book reviews were labelled with numbers. Likewise, people who commented on the novel in the online book review forum were termed 'users.'

Three fantasy themes were determined during the analysis of the reviews: sufferance, inferiority, and love and compassion. The related themes of setting, character, and action distinguished in the reviews will be discussed next in order to provide a context for the fantasy themes emerging from the reviews.

Setting theme.

Only one setting was identified in the reviews: Afghanistan. The users very often described Afghanistan as a country of invaders, wars, and victims. The setting of the novel appears important in the reviews. Many users judged the novel very informative. Khalid Hosseini intertwines the story with the history of Afghanistan and provides readers with more insights about the political situation of Afghanistan. The users read the novel's brilliance in its ability to educate about the history of Afghanistan and give a stark portrait of what life is like for women in this country. Many users articulated that *A Thousand splendid Suns* is worth reading on account of its ability to "open our eyes and make us see the true face of Afghanistan" (89) and to narrate the "accurate account of the struggles of Afghani women throughout the last few decades" (101). They often remarked it as a novel that every American should read seeing that it helps to "give some insight into the world of Afghanistan and Taliban" (90) and "introduces [them] to many of the political and societal injustices women face in Afghanistan, such as forced marriage, domestic abuse, economic dependence, forbidden access to education, and the prohibition of the most basic human freedoms" (92).

Narratives have an implicit influence on the way people view the world and on shifting their worldview (Appel & Richter, 2007; Appel, 2008). However, constructing a fictional story against a real historical background, as manifest in *A Thousands Splendid Suns*, induces readers to be even more persuaded. As Gerrig (1993) claims, a fiction will fail to have a real impact if readers make an effort to understand it as fictional. As long as readers experience the novel as an authentic account of social and political reality, they may be more easily influenced by the reality constructed within the novel. As such, the setting in the analysis of the book reviews is important owing to the fact that the intertwined historical background reinforces the role of setting in persuading the readers to perceive the characters as real ones. The strongest evidence in this

regard is the following statement: “this is just a glimpse of another *real* world – where a thousand splendid suns hide behind the wall” (88).

Character theme.

The character themes again are represented through heroes and villains. Within the book reviews, the same as the novel, Mariam and Laila were found to be the primary characters for they were mentioned most often in the reviews. Moreover, Afghan women became apparent as the secondary heroes within the reviews. The users occasionally sympathized for Afghan women and articulated their emotion and understanding for them.

From the users’ stance, the heroes are the champions of love and perseverance, while the villains beget dominance and suppression. In the reviews, the villains include patriarchy and religion. Patriarchy turns up as the major villain within the book reviews. The users very often distinguished some facets of a patriarchal society as the generators of violence and domination. Of the mentioned facets, Rashid and the authorities of the society were most often singled out as villains. Some users underlined Mariam and Laila’s alliance against “a violent and brutal Rashid who happen to be their husband” (8). They found it interesting that enemies come together for survival to stand “against their common enemy – violent husband Rashid” (14). The users occasionally expressed their resentment toward Rashid who was “older than both [Mariam and Laila] combined, brutish, bigoted and sadistic” (16). They expressed their dejection for the terrible conditions Mariam and Laila were faced with and “especially those brought on by the evil Rashid” (36). Some users remarked the authorities of the society as the prime villains. They condemned the government of Afghanistan who “believes a man has a right to beat, or even kill, his wife in the comfort of his own home, while the wife does not have the right even to defend”

(9). They blamed the governmental pressure that makes the heroes “unable to escape the many horrors that pile up in their lives” (59).

However, most of the users picked out religion as the major villain, while the second dominant antagonist emerging during the analysis of the novel was war. The users placed the blame on Muslim region for “the practices of the suppression of women” (49) and for “holding women in such contempt, enslavement, and abusing them so systematically” (136). Some users believed that the novel is a window to “the Muslim faith” that many “Westerners would never have known” (11). One of the users commented that the behaviour of Rashid as a Muslim man is “the main reason why I could never, ever, convert to Islam” (52).

The emerging difference between two identified villains in the novel and book reviews represents the different interpretations of the researcher and the users. One explanation for emerging such a difference could be the different cultural backgrounds of the researcher and the users. The researcher as an insider who has the knowledge of the dominant language and the culture within the novel perceives the war and the resultant political instabilities as the major cause of the violence. In contrast, the users as outsiders¹⁰ to the dominant culture and language might be influenced by the mediated stereotypical image of Islamic world as backward and barbaric as Said (1978) maintains. Although the impact of the researcher’s cultural background on her analysis and the impact of media portrayals of Islam on the users’ interpretation of the novel may beget some limitations to the study, in this case, it seems inevitable.

On the other hand, from the users’ viewpoint, Mariam and Laila are heroes owing to their enormous love and strength. Mariam performs “the ultimate act of love and saves a family”

¹⁰ Of the criteria for selecting the sample was existence of some indications to their background as Western readers because the study focuses on the Western readers.

(1). Their sacrifices are “selfless and painful” (36). They are full of capacity “for caring and sympathy in a world full of hate and ugliness” (39). They are heroes because despite the great amount of adversity they face on daily basis, “they persevered through personal heartache” (82) and manifest a great courage in the face of so much turmoil, hardship, and violence. Although Mariam and Laila represent the heroes within the analysis of the novel as well, they are not continuously perceived as acting heroically. At some point during the analysis of the novel, passivity of Mariam and Laila is so pervasive that their being heroin is vanished. In contrast, the users never hesitated to label Mariam and Laila as heroes. From their viewpoint, the heroic action of Mariam and Laila is reflected in both their acceptance of and their resistance to the adversity. They are perceived as heroes either for their self-sacrifice, which is manifest in their resistance to domination or for their survival, which is evident in their acceptance of domination.

Interestingly, another hero- the reader - emerges within the analysis of the book reviews, which was not identifiable in the analysis of the novel. Two rhetorical strategies underlie the representation of the reader as a hero: parallelism and antithesis. As a rhetorical strategy, parallelism functions to bond dissimilar groups of individuals (Olsen, as cited in Cooper, 1991). For instance, the users, quite often, demonstrated a sense of connection with Mariam and Laila. They often expressed their yearning to be “beside Mariam and Laila through all their pain, suffering and joy” (20) and their desire to “go visit Mariam’s grave and leave flowers” (140). They developed such a strong relationship with the heroes of the novel that they expressed how they feel “the physical and emotional pain [the heroes] suffer from the loss” (65) and how they feel being demanded to “love these two women for all the perils they face throughout their lives” (50). They occasionally sympathized for “these characters that don’t really exist but also for the people they represent, the real people of Afghanistan” (140).

Antithesis, on the other hand, embodies the representation of heroes and villains whose respective goals are opposed to each other (Burk, 1972), which is evidenced by the users' expression of anger and enmity toward the villains of the novel. The users demonstrated how they got angry "at the injustice of the way women are treated by the Taliban" (90) and how they got relieved by "the victories [of the heroes] ... in a world experiencing so much pain" (116). On occasion, the users shared their "anger and sorrow over treatment of women in many parts of the middle east" (66) with their friend and family members by reading portions out loud to them and hope and pray that "the Taliban never again return to power in this nation" (131).

Hence, the researcher discerned the users as heroes on account of their demonstrating a sense of connection to the female characters of the novel and articulating their indignation at the antagonists. Further, the involvement of the users in the drama as heroes will importantly contribute to determining the fantasy themes in the book reviews.

Action theme.

While the actions in the novel centre around the heroes' resistance and acceptance as alternative coping response to the engendered domination and violence, in the reviews, the actions largely reflect the great capacity of the heroes for love and their strength to survive. Thus, within the reviews, the dramatic conflict is chiefly between brutality and love. The villains treat the heroes with violence, while the heroes demonstrate a great capacity for endurance and love. The users very often demonstrated the heroes' capability of loving and caring counter to the villains' violent dominion. They exemplified Mariam who "did not have an easy day in her life, [but] allows herself to be touched by the love of Laila and her children" (1). They read the beauty of the book in its ability in developing "the love that is shared between Mariam and Laila,

and the sacrifices they make to each other” (69). They described this love as “the ultimate sources of strength [of heroes] in overcoming timidness” (23) and as a bond “that only two women can share, a bond that ultimately sets them both free from their nightmarish life in different ways” (106).

Moreover, the users placed emphasis on the strength of the heroes for survival and their struggle for existence. They very often wrote about the brave effort of the heroes to triumph over obstacles counter to the imposed brutal suppression. Despite the cruelty and violence perpetrated by men, the users found it uplifting “to read how the women overcome their troubles from time to time and [how they] grab some pleasure out of their pitiable existence (57). They celebrated the bravery of the heroes in drawing “strength from one another and from the selves they’re left with after every blow from fate” (63). The users admired the heroes who “struggle to survive, yearn for happiness that is always just out of their reach, [and] learn to endure” (77).

However, with the shift in the character themes, a corresponding shift in action themes comes to view. With the users’ taking up the role of heroes, the emphasis of the plotline is directed to the users’ response to the domination engendered by the villains. As a dominant response to the violent oppression, the users very often expressed their overwhelming desire to come to the rescue. They conveyed their strong desire to “be there for them and solve all their problems” (29) and “help [them] so they will be able to get their justice and freedom” (34).

From these character, action, and setting themes, three fantasy themes came out: sufferance, inferiority, and love and compassion. The next section provides descriptions of these fantasy themes that underlie the narrative structure of the reviews.

Fantasy theme of sufferance.

The very worst was lack of personal safety- how awful would it be to feel constantly unsafe, unprotected from physical harm, both in and out of your own home. User (10)

The dominant fantasy theme in the reviews reflects the dominant theme emerged in the novel: sufferance. The verified villains namely patriarchy and religion represent two major sources of sufferance. The researcher will not take space here to elaborate how the theme of sufferance is identified and reflected in the users' statements for it has been fully unfolded within the discussion of the character theme. It is interesting, however, to note that most often the sufferance and endurance of the heroes correspond with courage and resilience. The users regarded Afghan women with new respect for "their endurance and bravery they have shown" (34) and for their "incredible strength [that gives] hope for the fight in the female spirit" (80). They exemplified the strength of Mariam "whose spirit remarkably never breaks". They read the novel as a "fight against impossible odds, a story of hope when the situation is hopeless, and the resilience of the human spirit" (5) and admire *A Thousand Splendid Suns* for giving "an understanding of the strength that many women living in these areas must have" (103).

These statements indeed point to the existence of the rhetorical strategy of irony. Irony in its narrowest form is a specific figure of speech in which words express a meaning different from their literal denotation (Foss & Littlejohn, 1986). It is characterized by incongruity between what is expected and what occurs and involves the placing together of the incongruous experiences. The users very frequently associated the endurance and sufferance of the heroes with their strength, while the passivity of the heroes is reinforced in the deep structure of their vision. Although the users very frequently celebrated the bravery of the heroes in the face of turmoil and agony, they did not probe the heroes' active manifestation of strength and resilience. Save love and devotion, no other action was reflected in the users' statements that represents the bravery of

the heroes. In contrast, the users often extrapolated their own agentic response in the same situation. The strongest of such statements is, “if things like that happened here in America we’d all be sharpening our shovels” (24). As such, while Mariam and Laila were celebrated for their strength to endure and survive, their taken for granted passivity remained salient.

Fantasy theme of inferiority.

Women there are but possessions in their culture. A rebel being like me will not survive there. User (23)

Fantasy theme of inferiority is another dominant theme that emerged while analyzing the book reviews. Comparing to the fantasy theme of inferiority in the novel, an interesting contradiction occurs here. In analysing the novel, the patriarchal ideal of male dominance and superiority and female submission and inferiority underlies the representation of the fantasy theme of inferiority. However, the substance of the correspondent fantasy theme in the reviews has been recast within the reviews. In the reviews, the Orientalist thought of the Western superiority and the Eastern inferiority underlies the representation of this theme. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident (Said, 1978). Said maintains that Orientalism helps define the occident’s self-image by establishing oppositeness and others. He writes Orientalist discourse happens as an effort to maintain a culture by the existence of another different and competing alter ego. According to him, Orientalism leads the West to see the Islamic culture as barbaric and uncivilized that need to be tamed, while it gives the West a sense of its own cultural and intellectual superiority.

The discussion of the fantasy theme of inferiority in this respect revolves around the users as heroes and the corresponding action theme that embodies the users’ response to the prevalent

domination in the lives of Afghan women. As an effort to align themselves with Afghan women and their struggles, the users enacted the role of protector and saviour within the book reviews. They often expressed their desire to rescue the characters of the novel. They yearned to “do something to stop all of the awful things that human beings are doing to each other” (93) and “help them out of their predicament” (104). The users’ desire to come to rescue conveys, on the one hand, the need of Afghan women for protection and, on the other hand, the capacity of the users for providing protection. The strongest of the statements is, “how important it is that we fight for freedom for others who are not able to do it for themselves” (10). Moreover, the representation of the users as protector serves to create a corresponding image of Afghan women as dependent and passive while lending the users a sense of intellectual and cultural superiority. One strong statement that reflects the self-image construction of the users by maintaining oppositeness is, “it is really eye opening to read this [book] and see and understand how lucky we are to live in such a forward-thinking society” (24).

On the same note, the users very often sympathized for the female characters and lamented the miserable condition they live in. They felt irritated by “the terrible conditions and situation they were faced with” (36) and by “the injustice of the way women are treated” (90). The situation of Afghan women “brought them to tears many times” (9) so that they “shared [their] anger and sorrow” by reading some portions of the novel out loud to others” (66). The users often articulated how desperately they wanted to “feel their pain but compelled only to read on in thirst of any glimmer of happiness” (50).

However, sympathy, as Lauren Wispé (1991) defines it, is “the increased sensibility of another person’s suffering as something to be alleviated” (p. 68). When sympathy produces mortification rather than reducing sufferance, it banishes the idea of “systematic identification”

and, instead, creates a “phantom other” in its own image (Scott, 2008, p. 74). The sympathy revealed within the review is well construed based on this argument. The users’ sympathy does not seem to be aimed at identifying with the female characters and smoothing their sufferance. In contrast, they largely appeared to seek for constructing oppositeness and validating their superior status. Together with their expression of sympathy toward Afghan women, they very often demonstrated their appreciation of their well being status, which implicitly underlies the misery of the heroes rather than alleviating it. Most of the users appreciated their being in a country where their “biggest complaints are frivolous in comparison with what women around the world live with everyday” (119) and where they enjoy “the luxuries and liberties” for women (25). Reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns* encouraged them to “celebrate their freedom” (23), be grateful for the lives they have, comparing to “the way that women were treated under Islamic rule” (25), and “feel blessed to be an American and a woman” (122). This novel makes them grateful for “how far the rights of women have come in [their] country” (101).

Accordingly, by establishing oppositeness, yearning to rescue the heroes, celebrating their well being, and lamenting for the female characters, the users are apt to construct a superior self-image and a corresponding inferior image of Afghan women. Although the essence of two fantasy themes of inferiority in the novel and within the book reviews seems to be different, the overall message of both fantasy themes underlies the passivity and subordination of Afghan women.

Fantasy theme of love and compassion.

The scenes I was most moved by were the winning of a women’s heart by a child that is not hers, the adoration a mother feels for her children, and the strength of soul someone can show when it will help someone they love more than they love themselves. User (22)

The interaction between Laila and Mariam and their devotion to Aziza is the dominant relationship used by the users to describe the fantasy theme of love and compassion. While the researcher determined love and compassion as the sanctioning agent of the drama, which justifies the sufferance and endurance of the heroes throughout the novel, the users construed love and compassion as the alleviator of the heroes' sufferance. The strongest of such statements are, "finally, the friendship of two powerless women is powerful enough to defeat their tormentor" (69), and "their [Mariam and Laila's] love was so strong bond that ultimately sets them both free from their nightmarish life in different ways" (106).

Moreover, within the analysis of the novel, love and compassion turn out as the source of self-sacrifice of the heroes, while it constitutes a discrete fantasy theme in the book reviews. However, the different interpretations of love and compassion represent the difference between the focus of the researcher and the users, and in essence, do not challenge the central message of the heroes' feminine strength. They both reflect the capacity of Mariam and Laila for love and compassion as a feminine, innate strength. What is manifest in the fantasy theme of love and compassion within the reviews and the fantasy theme of self-sacrifice within the novel is the meager agentic behaviour of the heroes circumscribed by the villains.

Rhetorical vision of book reviews.

Combining the fantasy themes of sufferance, inferiority, and compassion and love diagnosed within the book reviews resulted in one rhetorical vision: *innocent patriarchal and religious dupes deserving protection*. The rhetorical vision emerging in the book reviews is in essence the same as that presented in the analysis of the novel. Although the users attempted to define Afghan women to be that of sufferers whose large capacity for endurance and compassion

lends them strength and resilience, the Afghan women's passive victim image remains compelling. The users placed weight on the strength and bravery of Afghan women in persevering against turmoil and hardship, but barely spoke to their active involvement in shaping their lives. The women's capacity to act, from the readers' viewpoint, is largely circumscribed by the patriarchal structure of the society and religion. On the one hand, the users very often doomed religion and the authorities of the society for generating domination and subordination, and, on the other hand, manifested their desire to play the role of knight in shining armour in the lives of Afghan women. Although they never described Afghan women and the heroes of the novel as passive actors, the manifestation of their desire to protect Afghan women functions to construct a corresponding image of Afghan women as passive and powerless.

That the users never challenged the passivity of Afghan women and rather, lamented their pitiable living condition speaks to the fact that they took the lack of Afghan women's agency for granted. Therefore, the stereotypical image of Afghan women as silent victims of war and violence is understood to be reinforced among the users. Furthermore, as became evident in the fantasy theme of inferiority, the users' sense of superiority is manifest in their impulse to come to Afghan women's rescue and in their lamentation for Afghan women's agony. Conferring the users an image of superiority composes a corresponding image of Afghan women as inferior whose need for protection is severely highlighted.

Chapter Summary

In chapter four the methodology of the fantasy theme analysis was applied to identify the fantasy themes and explore the rhetorical visions embedded within *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the concerned book reviews. The three emerging fantasy themes within the novel embody

sufferance, self-sacrifice, and inferiority. The combination of the fantasy themes within the novel yielded two rhetorical visions: *femininity as the source of strength and the cause of fragility* and *freedom through protection*. Within the book reviews, three emerging fantasy themes include sufferance, inferiority, and love and compassion. The combination of the fantasy themes resulted in one rhetorical vision as *innocent patriarchal and religious dupes deserving protection*. The relationship between the fantasy themes in the novel and those within the book reviews were discussed. Although in some cases they seemed to convey different messages, they remained the same in essence.

The following chapter will provide an elaborated discussion on the rhetorical vision of Afghan women within the novel and the ways in which that vision corresponds to the vision constructed by the users and that represented by the Western media.

Chapter 5: Discussion

To review, the followings are the research questions posed at the outset of this study:

RQ1: what are the fantasy themes identified within the novel?

RQ2: what is the emergent rhetorical vision(s) within the novel?

RQ3: how are the emergent fantasy themes chained out among the Western readers?

To answer the first question, the researcher identified three fantasy themes within the novel including: sufferance, self-sacrifice, and inferiority. The dominant coping response of the protagonists, Mariam and Laila, to sufferance is ascertained as endurance that embodies their frequent acceptance of and barely resistance to the imposed domination. The fantasy theme of inferiority that was entrenched in the protagonists' dependence on male protection, ignorance, and subordinate position is construed to reinforce their sufferance. Thus, the patriarchal ideal of male dominance and female subordination underlies the representation of the fantasy themes of sufferance and inferiority. On the other hand, the resistance as their infrequent coping strategy is manifest in the fantasy theme of self-sacrifice. As the analysis of the novel reveals, the protagonists' self-sacrifice is predominantly triggered by their maternal sense of responsibility and empathy. On this note, the protagonists' resistance is seen to be the manifestation of their feminine sentimentalism rather than their agentic behaviour.

The combination of these three fantasy themes addresses the second research question. Two overarching rhetorical visions emerged: *femininity as the source of strength and the cause of fragility* and *freedom through protection*. The first rhetorical vision reveals that the protagonists' capacity for self-sacrifice as their sole manifestation of their strength is an innate resilience that represents their feminine sentimentalism. Moreover, this vision shows that the

capacity of the heroes to act is chiefly constrained by the patriarchal structure of the society and the anti-feminine face of war in Afghanistan. In other words, their femininity renders them frail against the violence and domination. In sum, the rhetorical vision of Afghan women conveys the women's passivity within the context of Afghanistan. They are understood to be the passive victims of war and violence who have no agency in shaping their lives. Moreover, the compelling role of the male protection and the U.S. intervention in Afghan women's empowerment and freedom is salient within the second rhetorical vision.

To answer the third question, the researcher offered an analysis of a sample of relevant book reviews. Sufferance, inferiority, and love and compassion emerged as the major fantasy themes within the book reviews. Within the novel, war and different facets of patriarchy including forced marriage, patriarchal terrorism, the procreative blame, and the sense of male ownership appeared as the sources of sufferance. The dominant coping response of the protagonists was acceptance that conveys their submission and passivity. On this note, the protagonists are not any more perceived as acting heroically, and rather their victimage was highly reinforced. In contrast, the analogous fantasy theme in the book reviews exemplified how the users associated the sufferance of the protagonists with their strength. Nevertheless, the researcher applied the rhetorical strategy of irony to explain the incongruity between what the users stated and what their statements revealed. Although the users frequently celebrated the bravery of the protagonists in the face of agony, they did not touch on the protagonists' solid manifestation of strength, and rather they extrapolated their own agentic response in the same situation. As such, the protagonists' taken-for-granted passivity remained salient within the fantasy theme of sufferance, while they were characterised by their resilience and bravery.

The second fantasy theme found in both the novel and book reviews is inferiority. Within the novel, the fantasy theme of inferiority was constructed based on the dependence, ignorance, and subordinate position of the protagonists. As such, the patriarchal ideal of male dominance and superiority and female submission and inferiority underlies the representation of this theme. However, the substance of the correspondent fantasy theme within the book reviews has been recast. The Orientalist thought (Said, 1978) of the Western superiority and the Eastern inferiority turns to be significantly constructive in determining this theme. The discussion of the fantasy theme of inferiority within the book reviews predominantly revolves around the role of the users as heroes. The users most often attempted to align themselves with Afghan women and their struggles through expressing their desire to come to their rescue and lamenting their adversity. However, the users' celebration of their freedom and their well being serves to establish their oppositeness to Afghan women. In other words, by yearning for the female characters' protection and lamenting their misery, on the one hand, and treasuring their own freedom and comfort, on the other hand, the users appear to construct a superior self-image and a corresponding inferior image of Afghan women. As such, despite the difference in the substance of the fantasy theme of inferiority within the novel and the book reviews, the overall message of both underlies the passivity and subordination of Afghan women.

The third fantasy theme within the novel is self-sacrifice that conveys the same message of the fantasy theme of love and compassion within the book reviews. Self-sacrifice uncovers the resistance of the heroes to domination despite their frequent acceptance of their status quo. This fantasy theme found the empathy and maternal sense of love and responsibility as the exclusive explanation for the protagonists' self-sacrifice and resistance. On this ground, the agentic behaviour of the protagonists is seen to be restricted to their feminine sentimentalism. The same

substance can be explicated from the fantasy theme of love and compassion within the book reviews. Although the users placed the most emphasis on the compassion reflected in the interaction between Mariam and Laila and their devotion to Aziza, the burden of the innate, feminine strength of the protagonists remained compelling.

As such, exploring the relationship between the fantasy themes identified within the book reviews and those found in the novel shows that despite some differences on the surface, the overall message was the same in essence. Afghan women were predominantly construed to be the passive and powerless victims of war who are in need of protection. Against such a backdrop, the identified fantasy themes of the novel and the rhetorical visions of Afghan women are perceived to be by and large disseminated and chained out among the readers. Although this study did not provide any statistically significant pointers with regard to reception, the analysis of the book reviews aimed to provide more insights into how successfully the fantasy themes of the novel reach the readers in this study. Hence, the findings of this study lend more weight on the compelling contribution of the author to the representations of Afghan women and his role in construction of the readers' perception of Afghan women.

The objective of the study was to explore the rhetorical visions of Afghan women in the popular novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the ways in which that vision corresponds to the image of Afghan women reflected by the Western news media. As became evident during the literature review, the dominant portrayals of Afghan women in the Western media have shown them as passive victims of war, violence, and political repression, to be liberated only by the Western military intervention. The rhetorical vision of Afghan women determined within the novel, along the same line, conveys the women's passivity within the context of Afghanistan. Furthermore, from the author's viewpoint, Afghan women's empowerment is to a large extent

contingent on the compelling role of the U.S. intervention. Although the author chose only to touch on the burden of the U.S. military involvement in the last chapter of the novel rather than treating it exhaustively, the sharp contrast between two periods of before and after the U.S. attack reveals the author's emphasis on the underlying role of the U.S. intervention in empowering Afghan women and their freedom. On this ground, the image of Afghan women portrayed by the Western news media largely resonates with the vision of Afghan women reflected within the novel. Indeed, the representations of Afghan women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* function to reinforce the stereotypical vision of Afghan women in the West from the outlet of an Afghan author rather than challenging their portrayals in the Western news media.

To provide a better understanding of how the portrayals of Afghan women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* bear resemblance to *reality*, the researcher consulted the meager range of the literature reviewing the Afghan women's participation and their survival during the war period in Afghanistan. Although the need for an in-depth exploration of the reality of Afghan women to this end is well recognized, this small portion of the reviewed literature may lend more insights into the objective of this thesis. The studies conducted by Rostami (2003) and Skaine (2002) uncover how women in the context of Afghanistan have bravely shown their capacity to devise ways of coping with life even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Social activists created income-generating activities, which addressed the practical needs of women like education and vocational training. The women with necessary skills turned their homes into underground schools. Those who possessed few skills or lost their male head of household became beggars or sex workers while relying on women's support networks to meet their bare necessities. Political activists, on the other hand, got involved in anti-government protests during peace-time and participated in organized struggles such as abduction, assassination, and bombing of enemy

position during war-time. In countryside, women worked on the field at night because of bombing runs during the day, cooked for fighters, and carried out the food to them in hills. In sum, many scholars (Ellis, 2002; Johnson, 1998; Moghadam, 1992; Rostami, 2003; Skaine; 2002) construct the same argument that Afghan women are not the passive victims of policies, but rather they found their ways to move forward and actively contributed to social changes in the context of Afghanistan. Therefore, the representation of Afghan women as passive and powerless in this novel functions to obliterate the efforts and struggles of Afghan women for changing their lives and instead, reinforces the role of the U.S. intervention in their freedom struggle.

On the other hand, the analysis of the book reviews shows that the way the novel represents Afghan women serves to generate the sympathy and the sense of responsibility from the readers for Afghan women. The representation of Afghan women as passive and powerless functions to endow the readers in this study with a sense of superiority that is evident in their taking on the role of the protector and manifesting their privilege of freedom and comfort. As such, not only *A Thousand Splendid Suns* serves to reinforce the stereotypical image of Afghan women as oppressed and powerless, but it also predominantly contributes to the discourse of Orientalism. That the novel was authored to the taste of the Western readers could explain why it did find recognition neither in the Afghan literature nor among the Afghan readers (Mohammadi, 2011). Although the impact of the novel on the readers from other countries like Iran cannot be deniable, the exclusive focus of this study lies on the Western readers.

Additionally, it is important to note that the dominant society in the novel represents the norms and values of the Pashtun ethnicity. Rashid is Pashtun and his treatment of his wives is grounded in his believes and values as a Pashtun. Moghadam (1992) argues that purdah -

restricting women's movements so that they have limited contact with men outside family or village community - has been particularly the case in the Pashtun society where the code of behaviour for women is severely strict. She notes that although the movement of women in the Hazara, Uzbek, and Tajik societies has been circumscribed, it is not to the degree inherent in the Pashtun society. As such, the portrayals of Afghan women in the Pashtun society within the novel may not be representative of all Afghan women with different ethnic backgrounds.

However, Khalid Hosseini importantly contributes to the readers' perception of Afghan society owing to the popularity of his novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and the credibility of the Afghan authors comparing to the Western reporters and writers.

The focus of the novel on Afghan women was very timely noting the increasing world interest in the region after September 11, 2001, the war against terrorism, the heavy US military involvement in Afghanistan, the fall of the Taliban, and the assumed liberation of Afghan women. In addition, the political recount of Afghanistan lends more validity to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. These explanations could justify the high popularity of the novel among the Western readers. However, that the novel was authored by an insider to the culture of Afghanistan in a very opportune period when many individuals were enthusiastic to hear more about this country could be another underlying ground for the popularity of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

On the other hand, the Western media often oversimplify and decontextualize international news by rarely placing news events and issues into broader contexts. This kind of oversimplified representation seems to occur because the Western reporters do not have knowledge of the language and the culture. Moreover, they usually feel compelled to write a

quick story since the news events happen quickly and journalists are rushed in with no experience. At some point, they try to find symbols that match with the Western ideals about appropriate social policies (Fahmy, 2003). Furthermore, in the context of Afghanistan, oversimplified representation of Afghan women as passive victims seem to occur due to the mission of the Western media to sell the notion of war to audiences and justify the Western military involvement in this country. As such, the Afghan authors or reporters seem to turn to be more reliable in terms of their cultural and linguistic knowledge and their detachment from the legitimization of the military involvement. Khalid Hosseini as an *Afghan* author falls into the same category of dependable writers. However, as the findings of this study shows, Khalid Hosseini did not offer *realistic* portrayals of Afghan women and rather, helped authenticate the representations of Afghan women in the Western media.

To conclude, either Khalid Hosseini made an intentional effort to consider the ideals of the West and negotiate his international fame and celebrity status, or he unintentionally underrepresented Afghan women. In any case, his role in reinforcing the stereotypical images of Afghan women in the West and his contribution to the Orientalist discourse remain compelling, while he could have been more *realistic* and respectful in his treatment of the subjects in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Chapter Summary

By reviewing the fantasy themes and the rhetorical visions within the novel and exploring how these images reach the Western readers, this chapter outlined the ways in which the vision corresponds to the image of Afghan women reflected by the Western news media. The analysis revealed that the stereotypical images of Afghan women in the Western news media are mostly

reinforced by the portrayals of Afghan women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Moreover, the findings speak to the fact that the author of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* contributes to the Orientalist discourse by encouraging the Western readers to construct an inferior *other* and hence, a superior *self*. The significance of the author's contribution to the representations of Afghan women and the ramification of the underrepresentation of Afghan women were further discussed.

The concluding chapter will provide a summary of the study, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

What's the sense of schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon. And you'll learn nothing of value in those schools. There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school. Look at me. Only one skill. And it's this: endure.

(Khalid Hosseini, 2007, p. 18)

Summary of the Research

After the attacks on the United States on 11 September, 2001, Afghan women suddenly gained high visibility all over the world. Much of the relevant literature on the representations of Afghan women in the Western media speaks to the fact that the portrayals of Afghan women in the Western mass media render them passive victims of war and violence. Along the same line, a number of novels and fictions were authored while placing Afghan women in the center of the story. Among them, the researcher selected *A Thousand Splendid Suns* owing to its vast popularity and high readership among the Western readers. The objective of the study was to explore how the vision of Afghan women was reflected within the novel, how this vision was communicated within some of the Western readers, and finally how this vision corresponds to the image of Afghan women represented by the Western mass media.

To accomplish the above, a review of relevant literature on the topic of the Afghan women's portrayals in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was provided. It examined the situation of Afghan women during the four major historical periods in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, a quick look at the survival strategies and social participation of Afghan women in the same periods revealed the capability of Afghan women to fight to survive the war, to restore their basic rights, and to incite other women to contribute to shaping their own lives. Likewise, the literature review explored the portrayals of Afghan women in the Western media to realize how the Western

media contribute to the audiences' understanding of Afghan women. The reviewed literature suggested that contrary to the active backdrop of Afghan women throughout the history of Afghanistan, the Western media fail to feature the active contribution of Afghan women in the social and political context of Afghanistan. Another major portion of the section was allocated to Afghan media. The media construction of reality and the persuasive function of fictional narratives and novels embody the last discussion of the reviewed literature.

To address the objective of the study, the researcher applied a fantasy theme analysis on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and on a sample of relevant book reviews. The fantasy theme analysis of the novel revealed three overarching fantasy themes including sufferance, self-sacrifice, and inferiority. The combination of the themes resulted in two rhetorical visions: *femininity as the source of strength and the cause of fragility* and *freedom through protection*. By the same token, an analysis of the relevant book reviews was offered. The results demonstrated that the fantasy themes were well chained out among the Western readers in this study. Moreover, the similarities between the vision of the novel and that of users lend more validity to the findings of the study.

To find out how the image of Afghan women in the novel corresponds to the representations of Afghan women by the Western media, the researcher turned to the findings of scholars who explored the images of Afghan women in the Western mass media. Their findings unveiled that the dominant portrayals of Afghan women in the Western media have shown them as passive victims of war, violence, and political repression, to be liberated only by the Western military intervention. Along the same line, the rhetorical vision of Afghan women determined within the novel conveys the women's passivity within the context of Afghanistan. As such, Juxtaposing the findings of these scholars and the result of the analysis in this study revealed that

the stereotypical images of Afghan women reflected by the Western news media were by and large reinforced by the representations of Afghan women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Additionally, the findings of this study substantiate Khalid Hosseini's contribution to the Orientalist discourse by encouraging the readers to construct an inferior *other* and a superior *self*.

The selection of a timely subject and the cultural and language knowledge of the author coalesced to underpin the persuasive function of the novel and the author's contribution to the construction of the Western readers' perception about Afghan women. Nevertheless, Khalid Hosseini failed to challenge the stereotypical images of Afghan women nurtured by the Western news media. Although it is difficult to deny the pleasant and appealing style of Khalid Hosseini, he could have been more realistic, respectful, and deep in his treatment of the subject.

Limitations of the Study

Although the analysis of the sample of the book reviews revealed that the fantasy themes of the novel were by and large disseminated among the readers, the researcher does not claim that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is responsible for the creation of the images of the readers about Afghan society. Notable here is that the users' experiencing the novel may have been somewhat biased through their exposure to the mediated vision of Afghan women or their responses might be culturally and geographically determined. In other words, the users may have some perceptions about Afghan women through media before reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and their understating of the novel may have been affected by their preceding experience about Afghan society. In addition, the sample of book reviews selected in this study cannot be representative of all Western readers. That only English-speaking book reviews were selected is another limitation of the current study. However, due to the limited language knowledge of the

researcher, language of the reviews was considered as one of the criteria for selecting the book reviews. Furthermore, the authenticity of the representation of the website users could not be determined as one of the methodological limitations of online self representation. Overall, selecting the book reviews in this study entailed many limitations. However, addressing these limitations is beyond the scope of this study for the major focus of the thesis lies on the analysis of the novel. As discussed earlier, exploring the book reviews is a complimentary step to reduce the bias of the researcher and to fulfil the requirements of the fantasy theme analysis as the applied methodology, as to determine how the vision is chained out among readers. Future studies would address these limitations while diverting more emphasis on the readers' responses to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Likewise, this study was conducted by a single researcher while bearing her own cultural experiences and background. Although including the book reviews helped to reduce the bias of the researcher, her cultural bias may have been somewhat applied to the analysis. Moreover, this study has consulted a meager range of the literature on the Afghan women's portrayals in the Western mass media and the involvement of women in the political and social context of Afghanistan to provide a basis for its analysis that might be considered insufficient. However, the time and space limitation of the present study could justify the lack of an in-depth exploration of these two topics. In addition, choosing 180 book reviews enabled the researcher to include the statements of a larger number of people and provided a list of the most salient themes, but it failed to generate fuller statements of the rhetorical visions.

Implications for Future Research

Analysing novels and fictions to detect the portrayals of women seems a significant area of study to justify extending the research to examinations of other novels and fictions that have focused on Afghan women. This type of investigation could determine if the stereotypical image of Afghan women remains dominant in literature.

Moreover, the reviewed literature on the topic of the portrayals of Afghan women in the Western mass media indicates that most of the scholars in this area seek to unearth the justifications of the Western military involvement rather than exclusively focusing on the representations of Afghan women in this domain. Future research could place more emphasis on the Western media's treatment of Afghan women owing to the significant role of the media in maintaining the stereotypical image of this group.

Finally, the researcher suggests an examination of the *reality* of women in the context of Afghanistan to find out how this vision corresponds with the images of Afghan women reflected in the media and literature. It is important to explore how women are perceived in the *real* context of Afghanistan to better judge their mediated vision.

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Appendix A: Theme Chart

Theme	Statement	Remark
Setting theme	<i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i> opens our eyes and makes us see the true face of Afghanistan, and if there's only one reason to read this novel, <i>that</i> should be it.	Educational function of the novel
	It was tragic and deeply disturbing but a supposedly accurate account of the struggles of Afghani women throughout the last few decades.	Educational function of the novel
	But it is a novel that every American should read, it helps to give some insight into the world of Afghanistan and the Taliban.	Educational function of the novel
	He introduces us to many of the political and societal injustices women face in Afghanistan, such as forced marriage, domestic abuse, economic dependence, forbidden access to education, and the prohibition of the most basic human freedoms.	Educational function of the novel
	This is just a glimpse of another <i>real</i> world - where a thousand splendid suns hide behind the wall.	The setting helped the readers perceive the characters as real one.
Character theme	Mariam and Laila forged an alliance and harbouring resentment against a violent and brutal Rashid whose happen to be their husband.	Rashid is identified as the villain
	Interesting part is enemies (Mariam and Laila) come together for survival; to stand against their common enemy - violent husband Rashid.	Description of Rashid as the villain
	They both, and for different reasons, finish up unhappily married to the same man, Rasheed, older than both combined, brutish, bigoted and sadistic. Rasheed is thus a symbol for the traditional male role without declaring himself as such.	Rashid as the major villain
	The sacrifices of Mariam and Laila are selfless and painful. I could not help but get choked up by the terrible conditions and situations they were faced with...especially those brought on by the evil Rasheed.	1- Mariam and Laila are heroes for their sacrifices 2- Rashid is the villain 3- The connection of the reader with the characters of the story.
	A government that believes a man has a right to beat, or even kill, his wife in the comfort of his own home, while the wife does not have the right even to defend.	Society as the villain
	Because of social, governmental, and domestic pressure, the two are unable to escape the many horrors that pile up in their lives. The novel reveals the horrors some Islamic women must face in Afghanistan today.	Society as the villain
	he has opened up a window to both the Muslim faith and Afghanistan that many Westerners would never have known and has given his people a face and heart that may go unnoticed.	Muslim religion as the villain
	We had difficulty moving past our first-world abhorrence of tribal Muslim practices of the suppression of women.	Muslim practices cause violation
	HE is the main reason why I could never, ever, convert to Islam. How some treat their wives.	Negative attitude toward Islam religion
	It's hard to understand how a civilization and a fundamentalist	Islam causes violation

	version of Islam could hold women in such contempt, enslavement, and could abuse them so systematically.	against women
	She, who didn't have an easy day in her lives, allows herself to be touched by the love of Laila and her children. In return, she performs the ultimate act of love and saves a family.	The heroin act of Mariam
	they feel afraid to express any of their individual characteristics besides the ones that can unite them as women despite their disparate backgrounds, such as their capacities for caring and sympathy .	Feminine strength of heroes
	He painted them as heroines who, despite the great amount of adversity they faced on a daily basis, persevered through personal heartache and difficulties. I was amazed at the courage these women showed in the face of so much turmoil, hardship, and violence.	Mariam and Laila as heroes
	The strong relationship the reader develops with Laila forces one to feel the physical and emotional pain she suffers from the loss.	The connection of reader with the characters
	my heart went out to both Mariam and Laila desperately wanting to feel their pain but compelled only to read on in thirst of any glimmer of happiness. I felt being demanded to love these two women for all the perils they face throughout their lives, victimized due to the weak husbands and fathers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Reader develops a connection with the characters 2- Reader sympathizes with the heroes
	Having just finished it, I want to go visit Mariam's grave and leave flowers. I worry, now, for these characters that don't really exist but also for the people they represent, the real people of Afghanistan.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- The connection of reader with the characters and Afghan women 2- Afghan women as secondary heroes
	A few of the scenes in the book made me eternally grateful have the comforts of an American hospital where I could get the best care even though I was a woman. The victories left me relieved and the injustices left me depleted and feeling so helpless in a world experiencing so much pain.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Reader appreciates her/his well-being 2- Reader's expression of enmity toward the villains
	having read A Thousand Splendid Suns I hope and pray that the Taliban never again return to power in this nation.	Reader's connection with the characters
	I was so caught up in this story that I couldn't put the book down, and even read portions out loud to my husband who shared my anger and sorrow over treatment of women in many parts of the middle east.	Reader's connection with the characters.
Action theme	Eventually the friendship of two powerless women is powerful enough to defeat their tormentor. The beauty of this book is the love that is shared between Mariam and Laila, and the sacrifices they make for each other.	Heroes' action revolves around sacrifice and love.
	Women there are but possessions in their culture. A rebel being like me will not survive there. Secondly, for his clear and profound illustration of love as the ultimate source of strength in overcoming timidness and in performing great acts of self-sacrifice. Words are not enough to express how much I want every woman to read this book and celebrate their freedom.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Reader constructs a self image and the other 2- Heroes' action centers around love and sacrifice

	Initial distrust of each other eventually gives way to a loving and powerful bond that only two women can share, a bond that ultimately sets them both free from their nightmarish lives in different ways.	Love helps the heroes survive. Love as the feminine power.
	Even though the book exposes the cruelty that men can visit upon women it is uplifting to read how the women overcome their troubles from time to time and grab some pleasure out of their pitiable existence.	Heroes manage to survive
	Reading this novel, I can't help but feel thankful that I have not, so far, experienced the kind of oppression that women in Afghanistan ultimately suffered. They drew strength from one another and from the selves they're left with after every blow from Fate. And always, there was that conviction to fight to survive.	1- Construction of oppositeness 2- Heroes' strength in surviving
	You can't help but want to be there for them and solve all their problems.	Reader as protector
	It gives me notion to see the Afghan people with new respect, but particularly for these suffering women for their endurance and bravery they have shown.	Sufferance of the heroes corresponds with their resilience
	My heart goes to them, and want to do everything I can to help so they will be able to get their justice and freedom.	Reader as protector
Sufferance	This book left me with a new appreciation with my freedom here in this country, and it gave me an understanding of the strength that many women living in these areas must have.	1- Reader's appreciation of her freedom 2- 2- correspondence of strength with suffering
	the way women are treated is disgusting...if things like that happened here in America we'd all be sharpening our shovels.	1- Suffering of the heroes 2- Agentic behaviour of reader
	It is really eye-opening to read this and see and understand how lucky we are to live in such a forward-thinking society.	Construction of oppositeness
Inferiority	It also made me think about what I could do to help women going through these things in today's world.	Reader as protector
	I found that I kept wanting to help them out of their predicament.	Reader as savior
	how important it is that we fight for freedoms for others who aren't able to do it for themselves.	Reader as protector
	The situations these women are placed in brought me to tears so many times I lost count.	Reader sympathizes with the heroes
	It's so easy to forget to be grateful for the luxuries and liberties that we have. Just reading about the way that women were treated under Islamic rule makes me very grateful to have what I do.	Appreciation of the reader for her current situation
	I cried, felt outraged and even sick at my stomach at times.	Reader sympathizes with the heroes
	As a woman, I feel blessed to have been given confidence and	Construction of

	opportunities.	oppositeness
Love and compassion	The scenes I was most moved by were the winning of a woman's heart by a child that is not hers, the adoration a mother feels for her children, and the strength of soul someone can show when it will help someone they love more than they love themselves.	Love as the strength of the heroes
	Eventually the friendship of two powerless women is powerful enough to defeat their tormentor. The beauty of this book is the love that is shared between Mariam and Laila, and the sacrifices they make for each other.	Love as the source of heroes' survival
	Initial distrust of each other eventually gives way to a loving and powerful bond that only two women can share, a bond that ultimately sets them both free from their nightmarish lives in different ways.	Love as the source of the heroes' survival
	In spite of the war, violence, destruction, cruelty and abusive marriages the reader will see "a thousand splendid suns" through the love and friendship of the main heroines.	Love as the dominant theme
	Their kindness and love never falters even as every freedom and liberty is stripped from them. I think it is a thoughtfully documented representation of these silent sufferers.	Love as the dominant theme
	It is a clear and profound illustration of love.	Love as the dominant theme