Chapter-5

Representation of the Taliban in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*

I

The rise and fall of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan has been a very popular theme in fiction written in the wake of the 9/11. Khaled Hosseini too dealt with the same theme in his first novel *The Kite Runner* (2003). In fact, it is also the first novel written in English by an Afghan writer. Through this novel, the writer has given an authentic insight to the people of the world about the Taliban in particular and the customs and traditions of the people of Afghanistan in general. It is Hosseini’s close observation and great story telling skills that enable him to depict such complexities of life in Afghanistan during the regime of the Taliban. Moreover, the distance of time helps him to take a separate and objective view of the events depicted in the novel. In an interview Hosseini says:

And I happened to write a short story called *The Kite Runner* back in the spring of 1999. I had seen a story about the Taliban banning kite flying in Kabul, and since I grew up in Kabul flying kites with my brother and my cousins, my friends, it struck a personal chord, and I wrote a short story, which I thought was going to be about kite flying, and it ended up being about something altogether different. And that short story sat around for two years until March of ’01 when I picked it up, and my wife found it and read it and she loved it. I went back to it, and I realized, “Wow! I think there is a novel in this thing.” And I had been thinking about writing my first novel for years and never had the courage to, never had the right material. I said to myself, “I think this
short story is very flawed as a short story, but it could make maybe a
good novel.” And it kind of was a personal challenge to finally write
that first novel, and I began writing it. (Hosseini, Achievement.org)

Though it is an attempt to look at the role played by the Taliban government in
Afghanistan during its reign as depicted in Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, however, the
author’s other novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) will also be dealt with
towards the latter part of this chapter because: “Both novels illustrate to some extent
the excesses and abuses of governments, and the novels include references to capital
punishment, political and economic injustice, religious freedom, linguistic diversity,
literacy and enfranchisement, and familial relationships” (Stuhr 65). Though, *The Kite
Runner* is more laudable than *A Thousand Splendid Suns* so far as their storylines and
depiction of the critical themes such as ethnic clash, religion, and history are
concerned, still:

In both novels, characters are caught in a crossfire and overwhelmed
by external forces. Their inner lives are influenced by an often brutal
and unforgiving outside world, and the decisions they make about their
own lives are influenced by things over which they have no control:
revolutions, wars, extremism, and oppression. This, I think, is even
more the case with *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. In *The Kite Runner*,
Amir spends many years away from Afghanistan as an immigrant in
the United States. The horrors and hardships that he is spared, Mariam
and Laila live through; in that sense, their lives are shaped more
acutely by the events in Afghanistan than Amir’s life is ... *The Kite
Runner* was a father-son story, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be
seen as a mother-daughter story. (Hosseini, Bookbrowse.com)
The foundation for the following discussion of Islamic fundamentalism as one possible way of life for the Taliban lies in the history of Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini, who is a witness to the defeat of the two hundred years old Afghan monarchy that ended with King Zahir Shah being overthrown in 1973, had to move to Paris in France along with his parents in 1976 where his father held a diplomatic post. It happened that two years after their arrival in Paris Daoud Khan, the president of the new republic too was killed by a communist group which became the hindrance on their way back to Afghanistan. In addition to that the communist coup and the Soviet invasion of December 1979 complicated the problem all the more. As a result the family could not dare return to its native land. Instead, the family took political asylum in the United States in 1980 and settled as refugees in San Jose, California.

After the exit of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, the Soviet backed Mohammed Najibullah to lead the communist power in Afghanistan in their absence but did not survive for a long period. Subsequently, after the collapse of the Najibullah-led government in 1992 the Mujahideen leader Ahmad Shah Massoud became the defence minister under the government of Burhanuddin, the former Afghan President. The Mujahideen-led government too was overthrown and surrendered in front of the radical Taliban group in 1996, who had grabbed power in Afghanistan and would rule the country till 2001.

Based on the above historical facts, Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* depicts the socio-political set up of Afghanistan during the years from the late 1970s to the fundamentalist Taliban government of the 1990s until its fall (and the regime of
Hamid Karzai as the Prime Minister of a new Afghan government) in the wake of the WTC incident of September 11, 2001. It had brought a radical change in the destiny of the country. It reveals the endeavour of the Northern Alliance and sacrifice, individual and collective, in the country’s struggle for freedom from the Taliban. The major incidents in Afghanistan’s history that took place in the past for a period of thirty years, (from the communist upheaval to the Soviet attack to the Bush-led American war against the Taliban) were instrumental in changing the opinions of the people of the whole world regarding the country. Mohammad Asim Siddiqui has aptly said in this regard that “the act of writing becomes a means to preserve a past, rather to recreate a past ...” (71). The awful condition of the people as depicted in *The Kite Runner* was, in fact, the stark reality in Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban government. The author shares the serious issues like the political, social and economic changes of contemporary Afghanistan already mentioned above. Rebecca Stuhr has rightly said that:

Hosseini writes compelling stories through which he questions assumptions and breaks apart stereotypes through the strengths and weaknesses of his characters. He interweaves into the action of his stories the details of history, culture, and daily life in Afghanistan. He challenges his readers to reflect on discrimination and political abuse within their own experience in light of instances of such abuses in a different and unfamiliar country. (77-78)

*The Kite Runner* is written in the first person from the protagonist’s point of views with Amir as narrator. Amir is the only child of a wealthy merchant in Kabul. His mother died immediately after giving him birth. He recounts the long exciting journey of his life from Kabul to Peshawar in Pakistan and finally from there to San
Francisco, America. There he meets Soraya, the daughter of a former general of Afghanistan and gets married with her. During the short span of time that he lived in Kabul, Amir used to spend most of his time with his illiterate but sincere friend Hassan, the son of their servant Ali belonging to the Hazara ethnic minority. His happy life in Kabul came to an end with the arrival of the Soviet tanks in Afghanistan. He and his family had to run away to Pakistan and at last settled down in America.

Khaled Hosseini has used the flashback technique in the *The Kite Runner*. The novel opens in 2001. Amir, the grown-up narrator lives in San Francisco and is pondering over his past, recalling how he had deceived his childhood friend, Hassan. The action of the narrative then continues with a flashback to the protagonist-cum-narrator’s experiences during his boyhood in Kabul, Afghanistan. Amir’s latent childhood memories resurfaced as soon as he receives a call from Rahim Khan, his father’s “old business partner” and his “first grown-up” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 167) friend during his early days presently living in Peshawar in Pakistan. Amir, who is now thirty-eight years old, remembers the sweet and bitter experiences of his life in the company of his boyhood friend and servant, Hassan that took place twenty-six years ago.

IV

With the ascent of the Taliban in power, there came a radical change in the law and order in Afghanistan as depicted in *The Kite Runner*. Islamic Shari’ah law replaces the secular law of Afghanistan. The government does so purposefully to maintain Islamic environment as well as to stop the access of the popular culture in Afghan society. In other words the Taliban’s effort was to keep the people of the country far from Enlightenment the West claims to stand for. However, the modern
history of Afghanistan clearly exhibits the failure of the extremist government. In this context Khaled Hosseini wrote in the BookBrowse interview about the firm hold of the Taliban and the damage done to the culture and art during their regime in clear terms:

The Taliban’s acts of cultural vandalism—the most infamous being the destruction of the giant Bamiyan Buddhas—had a devastating effect on Afghan culture and the artistic scene. The Taliban burned countless films, VCRs, music tapes, books, and paintings. They jailed filmmakers, musicians, painters, and sculptors. These restrictions forced some artists to abandon their craft, and many to continue practicing in covert fashion. Some built cellars where they painted or played musical instruments. Others gathered in the guise of a sewing circle to write fiction, as depicted in Christina Lamb’s _The Sewing Circles of Heart_. And still others found ingenious ways to trick the Taliban—one famous example being a painter who, at the order of the Taliban, painted over the human faces on his oil paintings, except he did with it watercolor, which he washed off after the Taliban were ousted. These were among the desperate ways in which artists tried to escape the Taliban’s firm grip on virtually every form of artistic expression. (Hosseini, _Bookbrowse.com_)

In Taliban’s view “perhaps the most important item” required is “an artificial beard, black and chest length, _Shari’a/h_ -friendly” in order to maintain “at least the Taliban version of _Shari’a/h_” (Hosseini, _Kite Runner_ 202). However, the citizens of Afghanistan failed to keep pace with the strict Shari’ah based laws and were desperately looking for external help during the regime of the Taliban. It seemed to
them that the other parts of the world are not well informed about their despicable conditions in Afghanistan. They believe if the other countries of the world come to know about the repressive rule of the Taliban, those nations might come forward in their rescue. With this hope Farid’s elder brother insisted Amir to write a book about the miserable lot of the people of Afghanistan: “May be you should write about Afghanistan ... Tell the rest of the world what the Taliban are doing to our country” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 206).

It is also due to the firm Shari’ah law that the Taliban had punished two adulterers—“a blindfolded man” and “a woman dressed in a green *burqa*” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 234) to which Amir himself was an eye-witness. The sight of the punishment given to these adulterers in the soccer field “shortly after the half time” (234) is very touchy. They put them in “two holes behind the goalposts” (235), already dug, intended for the same purpose. Next, the scene that took place immediately after the completion of the unloading of the three trucks too draws the attentions of the readers:

Two Talibs with Kalashnikovs stung across their shoulders helped the blindfolded man from the first truck and two others helped the *burqa*-clad woman. The woman’s knees buckled under her and she slumped to the ground. The soldiers pulled her up and she slumped again. When they tried to lift her again, she screamed and kicked ... It was the cry of a wild animal trying to pry its mangled leg free from the bear trap. Two more Talibs joined in and helped force her into one of the chest-deep holes. The blindfolded man, on the other hand, quietly allowed them to lower him into the hole dug for him. Now only the accused pair’s torsos protruded from the ground ... A chubby, white-bearded
cleric dressed in grey garments stood near the goalposts and cleared his throat into a handheld microphone ... He recited a lengthy prayer from the Koran.... (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 235)

Yet again the readers find rigidity in the tone of the cleric who had addressed the public at the stadium saying “brothers and sisters” after the completion of his prayer and continued:

> We are here today to carry out *Shari’a*. We are here to carry out justice. We are here today because the will of Allah and the word of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him ... God says that every sinner must be punished in a manner befitting his sin ... And what manner of punishment, brothers and sisters, befits the adulterer? How shall we punish those who dishonour the sanctity of marriage? How shall we deal with those who spit in the face of God? How shall we answer those who throw stones at the windows of God’s house? WE SHALL THROW THE STONES BACK!” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 235-36)

The scene of hurling stones at the adulterers by the crowd till the death of the victims is notable in this regard. Even “the bloodied corpses had been unceremoniously tossed into the backs of red pickup trucks” so that “the teams took the field” and thus “second half was under way” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 237). It not only reveals the dictatorship of the Taliban and the blatant use of religion but also shows the wretched conditions of women in Afghanistan.
The ethnic disparity in the society of Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban is one of the most striking features apparent in Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*. It draws the attention of the readers greatly. As a result of the racial clash Afghanistan had lost the harmony between its different ethnic groups. The author has described such racial discrimination skilfully and vividly in the novel. While the “ascendancy or domination of one power or state within a league, confederation” is apparent through the Russian invasion and America’s war against Afghanistan, the predominant influence “of one social class over others” (“Hegemony,” *Collins*) is clearly reflected through the Pashtun-cum-Taliban government’s suppression over the Hazaras in the country. In fact, Afghanistan is a country where as many as seventeen ethnic communities live: “Pushtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimaq, Farsiwan, Turkmen, Qizilbash, Brahui, Baluch, Nuristani, Hindu, Sikh, Jew, Yahud, Pamiri, Kohistani, Gujar, Qirghiz, Arab, Jat Guji, Mongol” (qtd. in Emadi 3). Among these ethnic groups the Pashtuns (belong to the Sunni school of Afghanistan) comprise the bulk of the population of the country. Being Pashtun and majority in number, the Taliban targeted the other ethnic minority communities of Afghanistan. However, the wretchedness of the Hazaras (belong to the Shi’ite school of Afghanistan) surpassed the other minority communities of the country during the reign of the Taliban. Through such dominance of one superior ‘social class’ over the weaker, Hosseini has also hinted at the Taliban government’s rejection of the Western imperialism. The government did so by banning the Western popular culture in Afghanistan.

In *The Kite Runner* the racial discrimination is effectively shown through the dominance of the Pashtuns (Sunni) under the leadership of Assef over the Hazaras and the other minority communities of Afghanistan. For instance, Assef claims that
the Taliban had “massacred the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 187) in 1998, and explains the incident with great pride:

> Door to door we went, calling for the men and the boys. We’d shoot them right there in front of their families. Let them see. Let them remember who they were, where they belonged ... Sometimes, we broke down their doors and went inside their homes. And ... I’d ... I’d sweep the barrel of my machine gun around the room and fire and fire until the smoke blinded me ... You don’t know the meaning of the word ‘liberating’ until you’ve done that, stood in a roomful of targets, let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse, knowing you are virtuous, good, and decent. Knowing you’re doing God’s work. It’s breathtaking. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 242)

The Talib further adds something “fondly” to his speech, as if he had attended a great party and now he is sharing with Amir, his guest:

> Door-to-door. We only rested for food and prayer ... We left the bodies in the streets, and if their families tried to sneak out to drag them back into their homes, we’d shoot them too. We left them in the streets for days. We left them for the dogs. Dog meat for dogs. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 243)

Keeping in mind the above incident as narrated by Assef, one can easily guess what would be the reaction of the common Afghan people under the rule of the Taliban as well as the reaction of the other nations towards them. The ruthlessness of the Taliban exceeds the limit of toleration especially regarding the slaying of ‘non-Pashtuns’, as a result of which they were sometimes wrongly condemned of some heinous crime
actually committed by the Northern Alliance or any other ethnic groups like Uzbeks, Tajiks or even the Hazaras. Pointing out one such incident but real one, Rahimullah Yusufzai aptly says that: “The Taliban reputation had become so bad that few bothered to accept or probe the mass killing of Taliban prisoners by the Northern Alliance in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1997” (Yusufzai 114).

The irony lies in the fact that the Taliban government had made the Shari’ah based laws mandatory for the people of Afghanistan but it’s chief leader Assef “wasn’t much of a religious type” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 247) since his childhood. However, he has revealed the reasons behind his choice of joining the Taliban in front of Amir, which is to take revenge on Hazaras and the communists. He recalled the past incident when he was arrested and the subsequent torture that he underwent during the reign of the communist and narrated it to Amir as follows:

... one night, when a group of Parchami soldiers marched into our house and ordered my father and me at gunpoint to follow them. The bastards didn’t give a reason, and they wouldn’t answer my mother’s questions. Not that it was a mystery; everyone knew the communists had no class. (Hosseini, Kite Runner 247)

The prisoners including him were subject to the corporal punishment of the worst degree at a regular interval; hardly anybody could escape the punishment. Assef adds:

Every night the commandant, a half-Hazara, half-Uzbek thing who smelled like a rotting donkey, would have one of the prisoners dragged out of the cell and he’d beat him until sweat poured from his fat face ... One night, he picked me. It couldn’t have come at a worse time. I’d
been peeing blood for three days. Kidney stones ... They dragged me out and he started kicking me. He had knee-high boots with steel toes that he wore every night for his little kicking game, and he used them on me. I was screaming and screaming and he kept kicking me and then, suddenly, he kicked me on the left kidney and the stone passed ... I kept laughing and laughing because suddenly I knew that had been a message from God: He was on my side. He wanted me to live for a reason. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 247-48)

However, Assef’s “mission” provokes Amir to crack a comment through which the latter mocks the former for his vandalism in the name of religion: “Stoning adulterers? Raping children? Flogging women for wearing high heels? Massacring Hazaras? All in the name of Islam?” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 248) It might prick Assef but the comment of Amir is true to his nature. Assef on the other hand clearly explained his undertaking, which was to make Afghanistan free from the Hazaras. Assef has compared the Hazara with “garbage” as he said to Amir: “Like pride in your people, your customs, your language. Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage” (249).

Assef’s extreme hatred for the Hazaras is further reflected through his speech during the time of his conversation with Amir. Assef shows his astonishment and criticized Amir for the latter’s effort of coming to the former covering a long distance, from America to take the Hazara boy, Sohrab. According to Assef it was a futile effort: “I wonder ... I wonder why you’ve come all this way, Amir, come all this way for a Hazara? Why are you here? Why are you really here?” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 249) The long conversation between Amir and Assef ended up with a deal “to finish an old bit of business” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 251), according to which the former
had to fight with the latter inside the room in the absence of anybody else. Even Assef’s guards could not encroach in between the time of their fighting. Assef boastfully warn his guards not to come inside the closed room even if the situation was in demand of favour: “No matter what you hear, don’t come in!” (251) And the deal was settled in a familiar manner, thus he said to his guards: “When it’s all done, only one of us will walk out of this room alive ... If it’s him, then he’s earned his freedom and you let him pass, do you understand?” (251) For the first time throughout the novel we find Assef in such a temperament, as if he is a man of principle who never deserts anybody of his/her deserved justice and listened to his conscience. The fight began, and at last, after a heavy deal of fight Amir was victorious. Amir takes away Sohrab from the grip of Assef, whose obedient guards could, only, look at the departure of the two, with their eyes wide open.

Assef’s ill-treatment of the Hazaras and the other ethnic minorities not only presents him as cruel but also reveals the double standard of the Taliban government. The Taliban delivered a kind of fair treatment and good wishes to the Pashtun and the maltreatment was the fate of the Hazaras and other minority communities. They boasted of being Sunni and ignored the Shi’a. They favoured the followers of the political Islam but looked down upon the communists.

Contrarily, Hassan’s and his son Sohrab’s endurance of repression and severe conditions and the prevalent injustice in the society of Afghanistan accounts for their support to the individual voice of the author. They suffer for no crime but for being born in a Hazara family.

So far as Hassan’s pitiful condition is concerned, he became the victim of the Pashtuns at his very childhood and suffered throughout till his death. Hassan used to
stay at Agha Sahib’s house in Wazir Akbar Khan as a servant. Assef used to mock at Hassan for being Hazara and raped Hassan during his boyhood. Even after attaining adulthood, Hassan had to face threats from the Pashtun-cum-Taliban. During their stay “in the big house in Wazir Akbar Khan” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 191) for the second time, Hassan, his wife Farzana and their son Sohrab became the victims of the Taliban. In the absence of their guardian Rahim Khan, who had gone to Peshawar in Pakistan for his treatment, “a rumour spread” all around that a Hazara family had occupied the big house in Wazir Akbar Khan. It was beyond the tolerance of the Taliban, and consequently, Hassan and his family became the target of the Taliban. The readers come to know this whole incident through Rahim Khan, who revealed the same to Amir. In fact, Rahim Khan had heard it from one of his neighbours in Kabul through “a telephone call” as under:

A pair of Talib officials came to investigate and interrogated Hassan. They accused him of lying when Hassan told them he was living with me even though many of the neighbours, including the one who called me, supported Hassan’s story. The Talibs said he was a liar and a thief like all Hazaras and ordered him to get his family out of the house by sundown. Hassan protested ... So they took him to the street—... and shot him in the back of the head ... Farzana came screaming and attacked them—... shot her too. Self-defence, they claimed later—(Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 191-92)

Rahim Khan further adds:

The Taliban moved into the house ... The pretext was that they had evicted a trespasser. Hassan’s and Farzana’s murders were dismissed
as a case of self-defence. No one said a word about it. Most of it was fear of the Taliban, I think. But no one was going to risk anything for a pair of Hazara servants. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 192-93)

The Pashtun dominated over the ethnic Hazara even during the reign of the Northern Alliance. For instance, the incident of the ill-treatment of the military forces that took place on the street to the Istiqlal School during their childhood is an ideal example in this regard. While Hassan was going to watch a movie accompanying Amir in Cinema Zainab “the soldiers had teased Hassan about his mother” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 174) using American slangs. Being the witness of that incident Amir shares it with the readers:

Baba had forbidden us to take that shortcut, but ... We hopped the fence that surrounded the barracks, skipped over a little creek, and broke into the open dirt field where old, abandoned tanks collected dust. A group of soldiers huddled in the shade of one of those tanks, smoking cigarettes and playing cards. One of them saw us, elbowed the guy next to him, and called Hassan ... You! The Hazara! Look at me when I’m talking to you! The soldier barked ... I knew your mother, did you know that? I knew her real good. I took her from behind by that creek over there. The soldiers laughed ... What a tight little sugary cunt she had! The soldier was saying, shaking hands with the others, grinning. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 6-7)

Sohrab too meets with similar fate after the death of his parents – Hassan and Farzana. Sohrab is in great trouble as Rahim Khan said to Amir that “I heard he’s in an orphanage somewhere in Karteh-Seh” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 193). And the
orphanage too was not a safe place for the children during the time of the Taliban reign. Sohrab and several other children who had lost their parents during that period met with such a pitiable fate.

Earlier Assef had sodomised Hassan at his tender age and now the latter’s son Sohrab became the victim of the same person. The Taliban took Sohrab with a leering desire which was reflected through his behaviour when he called Sohrab and “the man’s hand slid up and down the boy’s belly” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 245). Hinting at the misbehaviour of Assef and two of his guards, Sohrab revealed his desire to die than to live an unclean life in front of Amir. Sohrab says: “... they did things ... the bad man and the other two ... they did things ... did things to me” (278).

VI

However, the readers get a vivid picture of the kind of repression the people of Afghanistan suffered during the regime of the Taliban government through Amir’s conversations with Rahim Khan, Farid, Dr. Rasul, Zaman and Omar Faisal separately.

Getting the news of the ailment of Rahim Khan, his “old friend”, Amir visits Peshawar in Pakistan in order to attend him. There, he comes to know from Rahim Khan the very details about his native country Afghanistan and the pros and cons of the Taliban reign there. Rahim Khan condemns the Taliban as despots. According to him, the Taliban are not merely bad but even more than that: “Nay, it’s worse. Much worse ... They don’t let you be human” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 173). Amir’s glimpse of the ruins and rubbles later on during his sojourn to Kabul with a purpose to rescue his nephew Sohrab gives an authentic insight to what Rahim Khan had told him earlier. In fact, Rahim Khan is witness to the Najibullah-led communist government, the Northern Alliance or the Mujahideen and the Taliban rule. Out of his close
observations of the above mentioned governments of Afghanistan, Rahim Khan easily comes to the conclusion that the Taliban was the worst of all. He has purposefully discussed the deeds of the Taliban as well as the other governments with Amir with special emphasis on the Taliban. And it is to show the contrast between the Taliban and the other governments separately. In this regard the Taliban surpasses not only the Northern Alliance but also the communist governments headed by Najibullah. It would be crystal clear through different perspectives of Rahim Khan regarding the different governments of Afghanistan. The readers are also aware of the implied messages of the author which is echoed in the descriptions of Rahim Khan.

According to Rahim Khan, the scenario of Afghanistan was different before the reign of the Taliban. “The way Baba [Amir’s father] had seen it those days, Afghanistan’s troubles were only a temporary interruption of our way of life—the days of parties at the Wazir Akbar Khan house and picnics in Paghman would surely return” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 173-74). In order to show the drastic change in the Taliban and their greater degree of inhumanity, Rahim Khan mentions the inhuman treatment of the Northern Alliance towards its citizens during the period of 1992 to 1996 and compares with the former. During this period the Northern Alliance had captured various parts of Kabul and ruled despotically. Rahim Khan says to Amir:

If you went from the Shar-e-Nau section to Kerteh-Parwan to buy a carpet, you risked getting shot by a sniper or getting blown up by a rocket—if you got past all the checkpoints, that was. You particularly needed a visa to go from one neighbourhood to the other. So people just stayed put, prayed the next rocket wouldn’t hit their home. (Hosseini, Kite Runner 174)
He further adds to his speech:

... how people knocked holes in the walls of their homes so they could bypass the dangerous streets and would move down the block from hole to hole. In other parts, people moved about in underground tunnels. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 174)

Rahim khan also reminds Amir about the frequent ill-treatment of the military forces on the street. Thus, the people of Afghanistan were so much fed up with the Northern Alliance that they celebrated the fall of the Northern Alliance with great joy. Rahim Khan admits it in front of Amir that:

When the Taliban rolled in and kicked the Alliance out of Kabul, I actually danced on that street ... And, believe me, I wasn’t alone. People were celebrating at Chaman, at Deh-Mazang, greeting the Taliban in the streets, climbing their tanks and posing for pictures with them. People were so tired of the constant fighting, tired of the rockets, the gunfire, the explosions, tired of watching Gulbuddin and his cohorts firing on anything that moved. The Alliance did more damage to Kabul than the Shorawi. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 174)

Rahim Khan’s description about the inhumanity of the Northern Alliance is insignificant in comparisons to the Taliban’s cruelty. His hopes and above all the hopes of the whole nation prove futile. Rahim Khan’s disappointment is reflected through his words when he says to Amir with a sigh: “Yes hope is a strange thing. Peace at last. But at what price?” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 175) The following description of Rahim Khan regarding the ruthlessness of the Taliban is revealing:
By then—that would have been 1995—the Shorawi were defeated and long gone and Kabul belonged to Massoud, Rabbani and the Mujahidin. The infighting between the factions was fierce and no one knew if they would live to see the end of the day. Our ears became accustomed to the whistle of falling shells, to the rumble of gunfire, our eyes familiar with the sight of men digging bodies out of piles of rubble. Kabul in those days, Amir jan, was as close as you could get to that proverbial hell on earth. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 185-86)

It’s true that the people of Afghanistan “celebrated in 1996 when the Taliban rolled in and put an end to the daily fighting” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 186). But such happiness did not last long. It was beyond the expectation of the people of Afghanistan that the Taliban would exceed the Northern Alliance in terms of their oppression. The Taliban even imposed ban on entertaining events like “kite fighting” (187).

The revelations of Farid, a taxi/truck driver by profession about Afghanistan’s past history, too, give an authentic insight into the despotic nature of the Taliban. It is through his two phase of journey, first from Peshawar to Jalalabad and the next from there to Kabul that Amir comes to know everything in detail from Farid. While travelling on the way from Peshawar to Jalalabad, Farid had told Amir that the then condition of Afghanistan was miserable and “the signs of poverty were everywhere” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 203). Then “he pointed to an old man dressed in ragged clothes trudging down a dirt path, a large burlap pack filled with scrub grass tied to his back. That’s the real Afghanistan, Agha Sahib. That’s the Afghanistan I know. You?” (204)
While Amir is clueless about the whereabouts of his nephew Sohrab and is madly in search for the latter, Farid, had generated a ray of possible hope in Amir: “May be I will help you find this boy” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 209). On their way from Jalalabad to Kabul, Farid’s revelation about the occurrences during the regime of the Taliban in front of Amir also gives an authentic insight to the readers regarding the conditions of the people of Afghanistan at that time. Farid is the witness of the war that took place in Afghanistan in Amir’s absence which the latter had seen on television screen. And now, he “was seeing it through Farid’s eyes” (213). Farid tries to create a clear image of the deeds of the Taliban in front of Amir. While driving his car, Farid tries to explain the whole thing in brief:

He pointed to the crumbled, charred remains of a tiny village. It was just a tuft of blackened, roofless walls now ... I had a friend there once ... He was a very good bicycle repairman. He played the tabla well too. The Taliban killed him and his family and burned the village.

(Hosseini, Kite Runner 214)

Farid makes Amir rather cautious by saying that “Kabul is not the way you remember it” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 214). To his surprise, Amir can see the most deplorable conditions of the people of Afghanistan. Earlier, during his childhood he had seen the beggars roaming around the streets when the numbers were insignificant. But,

Now, though, they squatted at every street corner, dressed in shredded burlap rags, mud-caked hands held out for a coin. And the beggars were mostly children now, thin and grim-faced, some no older than five or six. They sat in the laps of their burqa-clad mothers alongside gutters at busy street corners and chanted “Bakhshesh, bakhshesh!”
And something else, something I hadn’t noticed right away: Hardly any of them sat with an adult male—the wars had made fathers a rare commodity in Afghanistan. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 214-15)

A close observation of Farid reveals a metaphorical tone in his words. It sounded metaphorical when Farid said to Amir during the time of their conversation in Kabul that “the only people in Kabul who get to eat lamb now are the Taliban” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 216). Amir could immediately realise its justification. As the readers know the symbol of lamb is ‘innocent’, so it is not only the lamb that the Taliban eat but in the metaphorical sense the Taliban were responsible for the death of so many “innocent” people of Afghanistan. For instance, Amir could see the qualities of a lamb in Hassan, who too became the victim of the Taliban.

Farid, then, reveals the fact that the majority of the houses in the Wazir Akbar Khan district are captured by the Taliban. Some other people also lived along with the Taliban. Those people according to Farid were:

The people behind the Taliban. The real brains of this Government, if you can call it that: Arabs, Chechens, Pakistanis ... “Street 15, that way, is called Sarak-e-Mehmana.” Street of the guests. “That’s what they call them here, guests.” I think someday these guests are going to pee all over the carpet. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 227)

Amir is astonished to learn that the beggar whom he had given “a hundred thousand Afghanis, or the equivalent of about three dollars” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 217) in the street of Kabul was none but Dr. Rasul, who used to teach at the University from 1958 to 1996. His eyes wide open to know that this old man who is struggling for survival now, was the colleague of his mother Sofia Akrami at the
university in the past. But the poverty had robbed the old beggar of those sweet moments and the comforts of life. Once, a lecturer, now he is waiting and begging in the street of Kabul to earn his bread. His health is at its worst condition with “his left eyelid dropped over an empty socket” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 217) suffering from cough and cold. Any how he managed to cover his body with “a threadbare chapan worn to frayed shreds and a dirt-crusted turban” (217). The beggar cannot hold his tongue. He reveals his anger about the Taliban, supports Farid and asks even not to “stare at them” that “you might as well poke a rabid dog with a stick” (217). Then he shares his experience with Amir and Farid to unburden his grief-stricken soul, hinting at the short-lived joy and the never ending dilemma that the people of Afghanistan underwent during the reign of the Taliban. He says: “I remember the first time I saw them rolling into Kabul. What a joyous day that was! ... An end to the killing! Wah wah! But like the poet says: ‘How seamless seemed love and then came trouble!’” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 218) To his surprise, Amir comes to know from Zaman, the director of the orphanage situated in the northern part of Karteh-Seh in Afghanistan that though there are many children in the orphanage “but they’re not all yateem”:

... Many of them have lost their fathers in the war, and their mothers can’t feed them because the Taliban don’t allow them to work. So they bring their children here ... This place is better than the street, but not that much better ... There is very little shelter here, almost no food, no clothes, no clean water. What I have in ample supply here is children who’ve lost their childhood” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 222).

But the worst thing that takes place during the Taliban era was the trafficking of the orphans. Zaman is one eye-witnes of such deeds. He reveals in front of Amir about one secret related to the same orphanage where he himself encouraged it under bound
circumstances: “There is a Talib official ... He visits once every month or two. He brings cash with him, not a lot, but better than nothing at all ... Usually, he’ll take a girl. But not always” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 224). Zaman’s effort to resist the trafficking of the orphans at the cost of an insignificant amount of money was in vain. He says that “if I deny him one child, he takes ten. So, I let him take one and leave the judging to Allah” (225). Zaman, who had spent all his “life’s savings” on the said orphanage is forced under such an unavoidable situation. His helplessness is reflected through his speech as he says to Amir that “I swallow my pride and take his goddamn filthy ... dirty money. Then I go to the bazaar and buy food for the children” (225). It is also due to the outcome of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan that dead bodies were found hanging. On one occasion, Amir saw a dead body near the Khyber Restaurant in Kabul: “There had been a hanging. A young man dangled from the end of a rope tied to a beam, his face puffy and blue, the clothes he’d worn on the last day of his life shredded, bloody. Hardly anyone seemed to notice him” (226). On another occasion, while Amir was waiting for the Taliban leader who had taken Sohrab from the orphanage at 3 o’clock at the place fixed for appointment, he had seen a Talib “murder two people that same day” (240). Surprisingly, Amir later on discovered that that very person was Assef. His identity is revealed during the time of Amir’s exchange of heated remarks/dialogues with the other person. Amir does not fail to recognise him because “I saw a splotch of dried blood on his left sleeve. I found it morbidly fascinating that he hadn’t changed clothes after the executions earlier that day” (241).

The oppressive nature of the Taliban is also echoed in the voice of Omar Faisal “a good immigration lawyer” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 289) during the time of Amir’s approach to him to sort out the visa problem for Sohrab. Amir wanted to take
Sohrab along with him to America. Pointing at the possible danger that Amir and Sohrab might face due to the strict “rules and regulations” (293), Omar says to Amir:

Well, it’s like this. In the aftermath of a disaster, whether it be natural or man-made—and the Taliban are a disaster, Amir, believe me—it’s always difficult to ascertain that a child is an orphan ... So the INS won’t grant a visa unless it’s clear the child meets the definition of an eligible orphan. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 294)

Omar further explains to Amir that even in the case of a child who had lost his parent “the INS thinks it’s good adoption practice to place the child with someone in his own country so his heritage can be preserved” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 294). At this, Amir got infuriated and reacts: “What heritage? ... The Taliban have destroyed what heritage Afghans had. You saw what they did to the giant Buddhas in Bamiyan” (294).

Moreover, the detailed description of Hassan’s letter to Amir reveals the pathetic condition of the people of Afghanistan in general under the rule of the Taliban:

Amir agha ... Alas the Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land and you cannot escape the killings. Always the killings. In Kabul, fear is everywhere, in the streets, in the stadium, in the markets, it is a part of our lives here, Amir agha. The savages who rule our *watan* don’t care about human decency. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 189-90)

Hassan shares the most terrific and bitter experience of his life in the conclusion of the same letter which is the common lot of all the citizens of Afghanistan. They have
even forgotten to dream because there is hardly any scope for them to give a proper shape to their dreams. Exploitation was the order of the day where the subjects became its victims. Every attempt of the common mass of Afghanistan in terms of their freedom was in vain where the decree of the Taliban was final at that time. Hassan concludes the letter, reflecting his pensive mood and ambitions being shattered with a little or no ray of hope left ahead of him, thus, anxiously waiting for the fall of the Taliban government to be replaced by some other lenient government:

I have been dreaming a lot lately, Amir agha. Some of them are nightmares, like hanged corpses rotting in soccer fields with blood-red grass. I wake up from those short of breath and sweaty. Mostly, though, I dream of good things, and praise Allah for that ... I dream that lawla flowers will bloom in the streets of Kabul again and urbab music will play in the samovar houses and kites will fly in the skies.

(Hosseini, Kite Runner 191)

In each and every sphere of the life of the common people, there was restriction during the reign of the Taliban. Even, they interfered in the free choice of the players in the matter of dress and prescribed certain dress code for the players. For instance, in the Ghazi Stadium, “When the two teams finally took the field—all wearing long pants despite the heat—and play began, it became difficult to follow the ball in the clouds of dust kicked up by the players. Young, whip-toting Talibs roamed the aisles, striking anyone who cheered too loudly” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 234). It shows how the Taliban had suppressed the free will of the common people. Such kind of interference is hardly seen in any other countries in the world. Even it was not so in Afghanistan before the reign of the Taliban. The Taliban government did so all in the name of religion.
The Taliban also suppress the freedom of the Buddhists belonging to another minority community in Afghanistan. Khalid Husseini’s exposition of the knock down of the statues of Buddha in Bamiyan too resembles the actual incident which hurt the Buddhists throughout the world. This is how the Taliban proceeded and dug their own graves step by step. Rahimullah Yusufzai has aptly said that:

> The ill-timed and unwarranted Taliban decision to demolish the giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan in March 2001 led to worldwide condemnation and angered the Buddhists. It was the last straw on the camel’s back and the Taliban lost their remaining few friends in the world after blowing up marvellous pieces of Afghan heritage. (114)

Then, the attack on WTC in U.S on September 11, 2001 affected the Taliban rule in Afghanistan very badly. This heinous act reminded the Americans about the severe havoc and bitter experiences that they had undergone after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. It astonished the people of the whole world. George W. Bush, the then president of America suspected Osama bin Laden, the leader of the terrorist network al-Qaeda as the mastermind of the dreadful plot and held Afghanistan responsible for allowing bin Laden to stay/hide in the country. Khalid Hosseini has also depicted this real incident of the collapse of the Twin Towers (in 2001) in *The Kite Runner* very skilfully. In the year of 2001, “One Tuesday morning last September, the Twin Towers came crumbling down and, overnight, the world changed” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 316). But the most radical change that took place was in Afghanistan. The American president converted his fury into action. “Soon after the attacks, America bombed Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance moved in, and the Taliban scurried like rats into the caves” (316). The Taliban fought till their last breath at the battle of Kandahar but had to bow down in
front of the American force at the end of the day. What the Taliban were bound to do under such terrific circumstances was to hide themselves in the caves of the mountains and there were others who fled into the neighbouring country of Pakistan. Ultimately, “That December, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras gathered in Bonn and, under the watchful eye of the UN, began the process that might someday end over twenty years of unhappiness in their *watan*. Hamid Karzai’s caracul hat and green *chapān* became famous” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 316).

VII

It is interesting to note that the Taliban who despise the West for its popular culture are themselves part of it in some way. In fact it is one of the major reasons behind the extreme hatred of the followers of political Islam towards the America in particular and the West in general. The celebration of pop culture is apparent in the activities of Assef which will be talked about in the discussion that follows.

Being the mouthpiece of the Taliban as well as the political Islam, Assef too condemns the American pop culture openly. Shortly after narrating the inhuman incident of mass killing of Mazar-e-Sharif Assef “crushed his cigarette” and wanted to know from Amir if he had come from America. Getting a positive reply, Assef threw a number of mocking question at Amir which clearly hints at his extreme hatred for the Americans. Such questions are: “How is that whore these days?” (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 243) “What are you doing with that whore?” (243) However, Assef’s concern for the so called Muslim brotherhood and patriotism echoes in his latter question to Amir: “Why aren’t you here, with your Muslim brothers, serving your country?” (243) Furthermore, the quick shifts of his attention to the punishment fixed for those who leave their country for ever too are notable in this regard. The Talib says that:
“There are those in my circle who believe that abandoning watan when it needs you the most is the same as treason. I could have you arrested for treason, have you shot for it even. Does that frighten you?” (243)

However, if we trace the past life of this “New Age mystic guru” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 241) that is the background of Assef, we may dub him as hypocritical person. He rapes Hassan. But the irony lies in the fact that this very person had executed two adulterers and made fun of Amir, “grinned” shamelessly at him and narrates the whole process of the punishment given to the two adulterers at the “Ghazi Stadium” (233) already mentioned. In order to justify his deeds, Assef spoke out in a dramatic tone saying that: “Public justice is the greatest kind of show ...” (242)

Singing and dancing too are forbidden according to the Islamic Shari’ah. Despite the fact that the Taliban had made laws strictly on the basis of Shari’ah, but, they themselves had violated the same. “Pashtu music filled the room”, where, the Talib compelled Sohrab to dance in front of Amir, two of his guards and himself. Amir’s remark in this regard is ironical enough: “Tabla, harmonium, the whine of a dil-roba. I guessed music wasn’t sinful as long as it played to Taliban ears” (Hosseini, Kite Runner 245). It isn’t the end here. The manner of enjoyment of the three men including the Talib and his two guards are also remarkable in this context. They clap frequently and cheer Sohrab uttering “Wah wah! Mashallah!” (245). While the two guards whistle and laugh at Sohrab, “The Talib in white was tilting his head back and forth with the music, his mouth half-open in a leer” (245). Assef, who had molested Hassan during the time of his teenage now victimised Hassan’s child.
VIII

Khaled Hosseini has also treated the problem of the Women as one of the themes in *The Kite Runner*. The Taliban suppressed the women’s right to freedom. The helplessness of the women is evident from Hassan’s letter to Amir in which the former had clearly mentioned the degree of wretchednes which is beyond the power of one’s toleration. But there were no other options for them except to endure it. Hassan wrote:

The other day, I accompanied Farzana jan to the bazaar to buy some potatoes and *naan*. She asked the vendor how much the potatoes cost, but he did not hear her, I think he had a deaf ear. So she asked louder and suddenly a young Talib ran over and hit her on the thighs with his wooden stick. He struck her so hard she fell down. He was screaming at her and cursing and saying the Ministry of Vice and Virtue does not allow women to speak loudly. She had a large purple bruise on her leg for days but what could I do except stand and watch my wife get beaten? If I fought, that dog would have surely put a bullet in me, and gladly! Then what would happen to my Sohrab? ... I thank Allah that I am alive, not because I fear death, but because my wife has a husband and my son is not an orphan. (Hosseini, *Kite Runner* 190)

IX

Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* too gives the readers an authentic insight about the sufferings of a great number of people in general and the problems of women in particular during the reign of the Taliban government in Afghanistan. The author has narrated the story of Afghanistan from the 1970s to the post 9/11 era
in the novel revealing his great latent talent. It surpasses limits and illumines the people’s way of life in Afghanistan.

Hosseini’s representation (or exposition) of the Taliban government in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* bears arresting resemblance to the actual Taliban government in Afghanistan during the last decade of the twentieth century. Even the name of the actual Taliban leader, Mullah Omar is unchanged in the novel: “Their leader was a mysterious, illiterate, one-eyed recluse named Mullah Omar, who ... called himself Ameer-ul-Mumineen, Leader of the Faithful” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 274). Furthermore, if the readers go deep into the heart of the matter of the novel, they will find that even the incidents and the time period in which those incidents took place almost coincide with the events and the time of their occurrence during the reign of the actual Taliban government. The Taliban, as narrated in the novel, had achieved their first success by overthrowing “the warlords in Kandahar and taken the city” (273) in October, 1994. This incident also bears a resemblance to the actual happening. Since then, the Taliban did not look back until their mission was completed and had left no stone unturned to achieve their goal. They were successful in “taking cities from the Mujahideen, ending factional war wherever they’d settled” (274). The capture of Kandahar was followed by the “capture” of two other cities namely Jalalabad and Sarobi in the month of September in 1996 and the process continued till they achieved their goal in the same year.

In fact, the victory of the Taliban over the Mujahideen in 1996 had generated a ray of hope in the minds of the people of Afghanistan with the thought that they might be able to lead a better life under this government. As a result of which the expectations of the people were transformed into delights. They were involved in merrymaking on the streets of Kabul pronouncing in their loud voice: “ZENDA
BAAD TALIBAN! Long live the Taliban!” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 275)
The overwhelming happiness of the people leads them to celebrate the occasion by
“pounding their fists into the air” (275) for long hours and chanted slogans as if they
got relief from some kind of oppression that they had undergone under the regime of
the Rabbani-Masoud-led government. Even, Rasheed, one of the major characters of
*A Thousand Splendid Suns*, who had endured torture of the Northern Alliance
welcomed the Taliban government and celebrated its victory despite his knowledge of
the fact that the Taliban had “no *risha*, no roots” and “no past” (274). He had
expressed his opinions, in favour of the Taliban government in the following words:

> At least the Taliban are pure and incorruptible. At least they’re decent
> Muslim boys. *Wallah*, when they come, they will clean up this place.
> They’ll bring peace and order. People won’t get shot anymore going
> out for milk. No more rockets! Think of it. (Hosseini, *Thousand
> Splendid Suns* 274)

This optimistic speech of Rasheed in front of his two wives Mariam and Laila in *A
Thousand Splendid Suns* has semblance with Rahim Khan’s speech to Amir in *The
Kite Runner*; both of whom were fed up with the repression of the Northern Alliance.
They revealed their desire to get rid of this government and wanted a lenient
government. Rasheed, who is very boastful about the prospect of the Taliban proudly
reveals it in front of his wives that “the Taliban had one thing the Mujahideen did not
... they were united” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 275). But, when the Taliban
came to power, all their expectations came to an end/were shattered, as people had to
face greater degree of repression than in the previous government. It reflects the stark
reality during the regime of the Taliban. This is how their optimism regarding the
future security, safety and freedom under the forthcoming government remained a distant dream with advent of the Taliban in power.

The Taliban had declared/called their government as “the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 277). They brought a radical change in the constitution of the country, which affected the day today lives of the people there to a great extent. The Taliban, being guided by the principles of political Islam run/ruled the country according to the Islamic Shari’ah. However, the government proved to be biased so far as the constitution of the country was concerned. Instead of applying the same laws for all the people of Afghanistan irrespective of caste, creed and sex, the Taliban government framed new sets of laws for the men and women together as well as separately and put them into effect very strictly. The radical nature of the laws drew the attention of the people of the whole world in a very short span of time.

The common laws during the reign of the Taliban include the following:

All citizens must pray five times a day. If it is prayer time and you are caught doing something other, you will be beaten ... Singing is forbidden. Dancing is forbidden. Playing cards, playing chess, gambling, and kite flying are forbidden. Writing books, watching films, and painting pictures are forbidden ... If you steal, your hand will be cut off at the wrist. If you steal again, your foot will be cut off. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 277)

The laws meant for the men are:
All men will grow their beards. The correct length is at least one clenched fist beneath the chin. If you do not abide by this, you will be beaten. All boys will wear turbans. Boys in grade one through six will wear black turbans, higher grades will wear white. All boys will wear Islamic clothes. Shirt collars will be buttoned. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 277)

Unlike the Najibullah led communist government the policy of the Taliban based on Islamic Shari’ah was different so far as the distinctiveness of Muslim women is concerned. In comparison to men, women were subjected to more repression. They imposed as many as twenty-nine limitations on women mercilessly. Some of these laws had reduced their freedom to the least during that period. Earlier, the women could move freely from one place to another but the Taliban had enforced the laws to limit their free movement:

You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a mahram, a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 278)

The Taliban made the wearing of burqa compulsory for the women whereas there were no hard and fast rules for the women to wear burqa or veils during the reign of the Mujahideen. It is true that during and before the reign of the Mujahideen the women from the rural areas used the veils generally but it wasn’t so in the big city like Kabul. For instance, we get a clear picture of such a great contrast between the life-style of the people of the urban and rural areas through the conversation between
Mariam, the protagonist of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and his husband Rasheed on their way to the city of Kabul:

The women in this part of Kabul were a different breed from the women in the poorer neighbourhoods—like the one where she and Rasheed lived, where so many of the women covered fully. These women were—what was the word Rasheed had used? —“modern.” Yes, modern Afghan women married to modern Afghan men who did not mind that their wives walked among strangers with makeup on their faces and nothing on their heads. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 75)

Contrarily, the Taliban totally discouraged the free movement of the women even in their burqas. The women were allowed to go outside provided they must cover themselves: “You will not, under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 278). Even the lady doctors were bound to wear burqa during the time of treating the patients. Hinting at the Taliban, one of the doctors said, “They want us to operate in burqa” (291).

Mariam is one of the living witnesses of the incidents that took place during the regime of the Taliban as well as the previous two governments mentioned above. Through her views the readers can get further information about the administration of those governments and come to a sound conclusion regarding the differences in the degree of repression that the people suffered under the regime of the Taliban and the other two governments. She is the illegitimate daughter of a prosperous man named Jalil, who is hurriedly married off to much older Rasheed, a shoemaker shortly after
her mother Nana commits suicide. “Mariam wore a cream-colored dress that fell to her knees, cotton trousers, and a green hijab over her hair” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 29) before she got married to Rasheed. But that was not out of any compulsion. Rather she did so out of her own free will to fit her according to the demanding style of the time. Though Mariam’s traditionalist husband compelled her to wear burqa after her marriage, she had seen the other women in their “rustling skirts” during the reign of Najibullah led communist government. On her way to Kabul,

Mariam even spotted one smoking behind the wheel of a car. Their nails were long, polished pink or orange, their lips red as tulips. They walked in high heels, and quickly, as if on perpetually urgent business. They wore dark sunglasses, and, when they breezed by, Mariam caught a whiff of their perfume. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 75)

The Taliban government had brought an end to such free life-style of the women. To ensure the ruin of such fashionable culture allowed during the reign of the Najibullah-led communist government, the Taliban had framed laws and announced publicly:

*Cosmetics are forbidden. Jewelry is forbidden. You will not wear charming clothes. You will not speak unless spoken to. You will not make eye contact with men. You will not laugh in public. If you do, you will be beaten. You will not paint your nails. If you do, you will lose a finger.* (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 278)

Unlike the communist era, when the women could get their education, even at the university level of their free will “that they worked in office buildings” (Hosseini,
Islam 226

"Thousand Splendid Suns" 75), the Taliban had deprived the women of this right. According to the Taliban the women should be good housewives and should take care of children at home. They banned women education. And thus: “Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately. Women are forbidden from working” (278).

Moreover, the Taliban had established the ‘Department of Vice and Virtue’ for the proper supervision of the Shari’ah based laws because “these are the laws that we will enforce and you will obey” (Hosseini, "Thousand Splendid Suns" 277). The task of this department was to punish those who would violate the laws.

The wretched condition of the women during the reign of the Taliban is, in fact, one of the major concerns of the novel A Thousand Splendid Suns. The superiority of men over the women is maintained both by the social culture and the political order of Afghanistan. In the opening pages of the novel, Mariam’s mother Nana utters worryingly about “our lot in life”, the fate of underprivileged, untaught “woman in this world” (Hosseini, "Thousand Splendid Suns" 7) has to suffer the adversity of day to day life, the torture of male members, and the contempt of the public. Later on, Mariam recalled that she had heard about the dominance of men in the Afghan society from her mother Nana as she would realise it for the first time in black and white while standing in front of the judges at the court during the time of her trial. Mariam could not but listened with astonishment what the “youngest” of the three judges told her about the requirement of the witnesses:

God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can. Western doctors and
their science have proven this. This is why we require only one male witness but two female ones. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 365)

The final declaration of the sentence of Mariam for killing her husband by the judge based on the ‘Shari’ah’ was notable in context: “Shari’a[h] is not vague on this matter. It says I must send you where I will soon join you myself” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 366). Immediately after the pronouncement of the verdict, the Taliban judge shifts his attention and tried to recall the merciless deeds of the communist era. The judge could not control himself and the grievances over the communist were reflected through his speech when he said to Mariam that:

I have a picture of my father ... My mother used to say that he was the bravest man she knew. Like a lion, she’d say. But she told me he was crying like a child the morning the communists took him. I’m telling you so you know that it’s normal to be scared. It’s nothing to be ashamed of, mother. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 369)

Thus, Mariam “the harami child of a lowly villager, an unintended thing” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 370) had no place in this world and bound to say good bye to it.

Laila, the second wife of Rasheed is another witness through whom the readers can come to a certain conclusion regarding the patriarchal set-up and the imposition of laws on the common people of Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban. On the one hand she suffered the torture of her husband due to the latter’s partial nature regarding the opposite sex. On the other hand she had suffered herself and seen how the other people of Afghanistan endured the punishment of the Taliban.
The Taliban were found accountable of asking the common people to obey their Shari’ah based laws by extortion. It is evident from the fact that:

Laila heard of men being dragged from the streets, accused of skipping namaz, and shoved into mosques. She learned that Marco Polo Restaurant, near the Chicken Street, had been turned into an interrogation center. Sometimes screaming was heard from behind its black-painted windows. Everywhere, the Beard Patrol roamed the streets in Toyota trucks on the lookout for clean-shaven faces to bloody. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 280-81)

Once the Taliban had conveyed the Shari’ah based laws to the people of Afghanistan through the ‘radio’ and ‘posters’, they would expect immediate effect of the laws. If anybody was found guilty of violating the newly made laws, he was taken in the ‘interrogation center’ for punishment.

The Taliban keeps on watching keenly if the citizens are following the laws strictly. Women were their special target. They asked lots of questions to any woman who walked alone on the street, sometimes even in their burqas. Laila is one among those victims who underwent such torture for a number of times. One day, on her way to the orphanage where her daughter Aziza resides, Laila had faced one such embarrassing situation. The Taliban on duty asked her lots of questions: “What is your name? Where are you going? Why are you alone? Where is your mahram?” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 320) And she has to wait for their mercy whether she would be given corporal punishment or get away without any penalty: “If she was lucky, she was given a tongue-lashing or a single kick to the rear, a shove in the back. Other times, she met with assortments of wooden clubs, fresh tree branches, short
whips, slaps, often fists” (320-21). Laila’s lone purpose of going outside is to meet her daughter Aziza in the orphanage. Despite such valid reason behind her outing, Laila had to face the bitter experience of her life:

Sometimes she was caught, questioned, scolded—two, three, even four times in a single day. Then the whips came down and the antennas sliced through the air, and she trudged home, bloodied, without so much as a glimpse of Aziza. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 321)

The manner in which the Talibs torment Laila for going outside without accompanying any ‘mahram’ is noteworthy. She is scared so much about the Talibs and their behaviour followed by physical punishment that “soon Laila took to wearing extra layers, even in the heat, two, three sweaters beneath the burqa, for padding against the beatings” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 321).

Unlike the regime of the communist government (1978 to 1992) when women enjoyed rights, the Taliban period was marked by women oppression. Under the communist government the women were as free as the men in taking their own decisions; they worked together with the men in the same office; boys and girls studied together without any discrimination; wearing veil or burqa was not compulsory; and above all the women could raise voice against the injustices done to them. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the positive steps regarding the encouragement of women education under the rule of the communist government is also evident through the information of Babai, a minor character in the novel. One night while taking their dinner together, Babai says to her daughter Laila (in the presence of his wife) that:
The government had sponsored literacy classes for all women. Almost two-thirds of the students at Kabul University were women now ... 

*Women have always had it hard in this country, Laila, but they’re probably more free now, under the communists, and have more rights than they’ve ever had before ... it’s a good time to be a woman in Afghanistan. And you can take advantage of that, Laila. Of course, women’s freedom—.... (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 135)*

Laila’s teacher Shanzai is another minor but bold character in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* who protests the gender inequality in the Afghan patriarchal set-up. She is also popularly known as Khala Rangmaal and Auntie Painter among her students. She protested against the wearing of burqa by women while taking a class in the school in Kabul in the spring of 1987. Contrarily, she encouraged the girl students to drop the idea of covering themselves with burqas: “She did not cover and forbade the female students from doing it. She said women and men were equal in every way and there was no reason women should cover if men didn’t” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 111). But her revolt against the patriarchal society could not continue. “In April 1992 ... Najibullah surrendered at last and was given sanctuary in the UN compound near Darulaman Palace, south of the city” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 159). With the fall/end of the Najibullah led communist government and the rise of the ‘anticommunist’ Mujahideen-led/(Rabbani-Massoud led) government under the leadership of Borhan-ul-Din in 1992, the freedom of women was reduced to a great extent:

The freedoms and opportunities that women had enjoyed between 1978 and 1992 were a thing of the past now ... Since the Mujahideen takeover in April 1992, Afghanistan’s name had been changed to the
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Islamic State of Afghanistan. The Supreme Court under Rabbani was filled now with hardliner mullahs who did away with the communist-era decrees that empowered women and instead passed rulings based on Shari’ah, strict Islamic laws that ordered women to cover, forbade their travel without a male relative, punished adultery with stoning.

(Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 259-60)

In fact, these laws were not strictly enforced upon the citizens of Afghanistan as they were “busy killing each other” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 260). Certain major issues like women education continued and the wearing of burqa was still voluntary.

However, the situation for women changed completely with the coming of the Taliban government. Even Laila’s little daughter Aziza is aware about the motive of the Taliban. She lets the readers know that the children at the orphanage including herself are afraid of the Taliban who do not favour women education. Aziza claims that “we put the books away and pretend to knit” (321) whenever they see the Taliban roaming around it. The children are very much worried about the Taliban and prefer to stay behind the shutters. Aziza expresses all this to her mother boldly during the time of the latter’s visit to the orphanage. Just before starting their conversation, Aziza has given a hint to her mother about the possible danger. She says to her mother in a worried tone that “... we have to pull the curtains ... so the Taliban don’t see us” (321).

Next, the director of the orphanage Kaka Zaman, who knew the pros and cons of the Taliban mission, is also frightened of the Taliban. He used to teach the children at the orphanage “sometimes geography, a bit of history or science, something about
plants, animals”, but at the same time “Kaka Zaman had knitting needles and balls of yarn ready ... in case of a Taliban inspection” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 321).

Moreover, the Taliban also treated the women badly in comparison to the men in various prisons of Afghanistan. For example, the female prisoners at the “Walayat women’s prison” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 361) were hardly kept in the well maintained prison cells, whereas the male prisoners were given shelter in better cells. The female prisoners are kept in the “unfurnished rooms, with dirty, peeling walls” (361). The windows were without glass and “no curtains either”. Taking this opportunity,

... the Talib guards who roamed the courtyard had an eyeful of the interior of the cells. Some of the women complained that the guards smoked outside the window and leered in, with their inflamed eyes and wolfish smiles, that they muttered indecent jokes to each other about them. Because of this, most of the women wore burqas all day and lifted them only after sundown, after the main gate was locked and the guards had gone to their posts. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 361-62)

The attitude of the Taliban towards the various minor ethnic groups of Afghanistan was not encouraging. It was exposed even before the Taliban had come to power. While capturing different cities they came across the Hazaras, their bitter enemies on their way toward Kabul: “They had captured the Hazara commander Abdul Ali Mazari and executed him. For months, they’d settled in the southern
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outskirts of Kabul, firing on the city, exchanging rockets with Ahmad Shah Massoud” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 274).

The Taliban government had made separate laws on the basis of caste and religion too. It was clearly stated/mentioned in the constitution of that country that: “If you are not Muslim, do not worship where you can be seen by Muslims. If you do, you will be beaten and imprisoned. If you are caught trying to convert a Muslim to your faith, you will be executed” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 278).

The Buddhists also suffer under the regime of the Taliban. The government had blown up their age old deity in Bamiyan and, wiped out one rare relic from Afghanistan:

... the Taliban had planted TNT in the crevices of the giant Buddhas in Bamiyan and blown them apart, calling them objects of idolatry and sin. There was an outcry around the world, from the U.S. to China. Governments, historians, and archaeologists from all over the globe had written letters, pleaded with the Taliban not to demolish the two greatest historical artifacts in Afghanistan. But the Taliban had gone ahead and detonated their explosives inside the two-thousand-year-old Buddhas. They had chanted Allah-u-akbar with each blast, cheered each time the statues lost an arm or a leg in a crumbling cloud of dust.

(Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 313)

The hostile attitude of the Taliban towards the communists is also evident in A Thousand Splendid Suns. It is clearly reflected through their rigorous punishment to the communist leader Najibullah. It was due to the clash between the ideology of the political Islam and the ideology of the communism. As followers of political Islam,
the Taliban celebrated their victory by tormenting this Soviet backed communist leader to begin with; assassinated him and at last pulled his dead body throughout the road:

... the Taliban had dragged Najibullah from his sanctuary at the UN headquarters near Darulaman Palace. That they had tortured him for hours, then tied his legs to a truck and dragged his lifeless body through the streets ... This is what we do with infidels who commit crimes against Islam! (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 276)

The clash of fundamentalisms—Islamic and liberal is also obvious in A Thousand Splendid Suns. It is manifested through the Taliban’s rejection of the Western popular culture of the postmodern era. It is already mentioned above that one of the major reasons behind the extreme hatred of the radical Islamists against the West in general and America in particular is the popular culture of the West. Being the followers of political Islam, the Taliban government has banned pop culture in Afghanistan: “The Taliban had banned television. Videotapes had been gouged publicly, the tapes ripped out and strung on fence posts. Satellite dishes had been hung from lampposts” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 298). Earlier, the people of Afghanistan could watch “Hindi films” in “theatres” (281) according to their free choices. For instance, in A Thousand Splendid Suns Mariam recalled the day of her fifteenth birthday in ‘the spring of 1994’, when she was eagerly waiting for her father Jalil, sitting beside her mother, Nana (in the colba). She was cherishing a desire to accompany her father to see the American film which was showing at the cinema hall in Herat: “I want you to take me to your cinema ... I want to see the cartoon. I want to see the puppet boy” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 26). Mariam’s love of popular culture gives an indication of the secular character of Afghanistan before the
Taliban’s rise to power. But under the regime of the fundamentalist Taliban nobody dares to think of going to the cinema hall because “watching films ... are forbidden” (277). Moreover: “They [Taliban] shut down the cinemas too. Cinema Park. Ariana. Aryub. Projection rooms were ransacked and reels of films set to fire” (281). Furthermore, Mariam remembered the day when she went to a restaurant along with her husband where music was common means of entertainment for the customers during the reign of the Mujahideen. In other words “the walls smelled faintly of raw meat and the music” though “she did not mind so much the music” (73). It becomes a distant dream during the Taliban era, because “singing is forbidden” (277) in the country. This is how the journey of Mariam’s life in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* let the readers know the realistic representation of the pre-Taliban and the Taliban rule to a great extent.

While maintaining strict laws based on Shari’ah to rule the country, the Taliban government remains watchful of the Western popular culture comprising music, T.V. and cinema as well as other aspects of life like drugs, adultery, wine, homosexuality and lesbianism. The Taliban take stern action against anyone who is found guilty of breaching the laws of the country. Rasheed, one of the major characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, who listens to “the voice of Shari’ah” on “every Wednesday night” knows “when the Taliban would announce the names of those scheduled for punishment” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 281). Despite his knowledge of the kind of punishment, Rasheed “smiled with pride” (298) and tells his wife Laila, that he has managed one television. His further revelation that: “... just because things were banned didn’t mean you couldn’t find them” (298) aroused laughter in the readers because of the ironical tone of his speech. However, the severe
nature of the punishment is clearly reflected through the conversation that took place between Mariam and Laila, the two wives of Rasheed:

Kharabat, Kabul’s ancient music ghetto, was silenced. Musicians were beaten and imprisoned, their rubabs, tambouras, and harmoniums trampled upon. The Taliban went to the grave of Tariq’s favourite singer, Ahmad Zahir, and fired bullets into it. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 281)

Rasheed also talks about the incident of stoning of the two adulterers in the Ghazi Stadium (which has also been talked about in *The Kite Runner*), when “on Fridays, he went to Ghazi Stadium, bought a Pepsi, and watched the spectacle” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 281). It creates an impression in the mind of the readers that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a sequel to *The Kite Runner*.

The Taliban have actively carried out their duty with frequent ‘raids’: “Sometimes monthly raids, sometimes weekly. Of late, almost daily. Mostly, the Taliban confiscated stuff, gave a kick to someone’s rear, whacked the back of a head or two. But sometimes there were public beatings, lashings of soles and palms” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 300). Regular raids terrified the people to such an extent that nobody dare go out of their homes during the time of raids. During one such occasion, when the raid was being carried out, Mariam and Laila had to hide their TV beneath the earth:

They lowered the TV into the hole by each clutching one end of the plastic sheet in which it was wrapped ... They patted the dirt when they were done, filling the hole up again. They tossed some of it around so it wouldn’t look conspicuous ... When it was safer, they’d agreed,
when the Taliban cut down on their raids, in a month or two or six, or maybe longer, they would dig the TV up. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 300-01)

It may sound funny to hear that the Taliban put restrictions on hearty laughter but it’s a fact. It creates so much panic in the people that they seldom gather enough courage to laugh with gusto. It is so because the “whip-toting, *naswar*-chewing Talibs patrolled Titanic City on the lookout for the indiscreet laugh, the unveiled face” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 326).

Rasheed has a clear notion about who controls the Taliban. He tells Mariam: “Meet our real masters ... Pakistani and Arab Islamists. The Taliban are puppets. These are the big players and Afghanistan is their playground” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 307). Rasheed further shared with Mariam, the “rumours” regarding these ‘Islamists’ from Pakistan and Arab that “the Taliban were allowing these people to set up secret camps all over the country, where young men were being trained to become suicide bombers and jihadi fighters” (308).

Soon after the death of the Mujahideen leader Ahmad Shah Massoud in the month of September, 2001, the other news that puzzled the people throughout the world was the demolition of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in the U.S., which had great impact on Afghanistan in no time. Tariq and Laila along with “several guests” were watching the news update on the television in the “hotel lobby” in which they were working (as cleaner/waiter) with great surprise:

The TV is tuned to BBC. On the screen is a building, a tower, black smoke billowing from its top floors ... a plane appears from the corner of the screen. It crashes into the adjacent tower, exploding into a
fireball that dwarfs any ball of fire that Laila has ever seen ... In less than two hours, both towers have collapsed. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 384)

Immediately after the falling down of the Twin Towers “Afghanistan and the Taliban and Osama bin Laden” became the headlines of “all the TV stations” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 384). The occurrence of this incident in which Osama bin Laden was the prime suspect resembles the real 9/11 incident that took place in 2001. The Taliban had shown their favour to the prime accused Osama bin Laden. Tariq said to Laila about the opinions of the Taliban in favour of bin Laden that he knew:

> The Taliban have announced that they won’t relinquish bin Laden because he is a *mehman*, a guest, who has found sanctuary in Afghanistan and it is against the *Pashtunwali* code of ethics to turn over a guest. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 384)

This kind of favour for the mastermind bin Laden infuriated the then American president George W. Bush to such a great extent that while giving speech “his voice wavers” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 384). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila and Tariq are the witness to this fact who had watched it on the screen of the TV in the same hotel lobby after a couple of days since the attacks. Ultimately, “Bush has just declared war” on Afghanistan, more precisely, against the Taliban “to begin with” (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 385). The declaration of war against the Taliban had fulfilled the aspirations of the late Ahmad Shah Massoud, “the Lion of Panjshir” (383), who had “spoken to the European Parliament” (312) before his death and sowed the seed of future hope by alerting the West about the possible threat that they might encounter. To ensure their victory over the Taliban, the Americans seek the aid
from the Northern Alliance: “The Americans have armed the warlords once more, and enlisted the help of the Northern Alliance to drive out the Taliban and find bin Laden” (385). Tariq is nostalgic and expresses his optimistic views about the ongoing war between the Taliban and the Americans. He imagines the consequences which might be beneficial for the people of Afghanistan: “May be this is necessary. May be there will be hope when Bush’s bombs stop falling” (386). At last it happened that by July 2002,

The coalition forces have driven the Taliban out of every major city, pushed them across the border to Pakistan and to the mountains in the south and east of Afghanistan. ISAF, an international peacekeeping force, has been sent to Kabul. The country has an interim president now, Hamid Karzai. (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 388-89)

This is how the Taliban era comes to an end in Afghanistan. Hence, onwards everything becomes as it was during the time of the communist reign in the country: “...schools built in Kabul, roads repaved, women returning to work ...” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 389). Now, women are no more bound to wear burqa nor do they have to accompany any male member while going out of their homes. They can freely go and attend office and work. Once again the female education is recognised. Girls can go and attend classes without any hesitation and fear. One can listen music as “Laila hears music at Kabul’s street corners, rubab and table, dootar, harmonium and tamboura, old Ahmad Zahir songs” (Hosseini, Thousand Splendid Suns 410) before the reign of the Taliban:

The hallway’s walls are covered now with posters, of dinosaurs, cartoon characters, the Buddhas of Bamiyan, and displays of artwork.
by the orphans. Many of the drawings depict tanks running over huts, men brandishing AK-47s, refugee camp tents, scenes of jihad.

(Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 412)

Through the eyes of Laila the readers also get a clear picture of the ruined state of Afghanistan that occurred during the regime of the Taliban and its slow and steady remaking after their fall under the new ruler:

... that the promised aid money to Afghanistan isn’t coming, that the rebuilding is going too slowly, that there is corruption, that the Taliban are regrouping already and will come back with a vengeance, that the world will forget once again about Afghanistan. (Hosseini, *Thousand Splendid Suns* 413)

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* has shown how ruthlessly the Taliban ruled Afghanistan during their reign, however, for a short period. But the readers should keep in mind that the power of the fundamentalists in the country does not last long and at the same time one cannot deny the country’s rich heritage during the past. It is already mentioned above that a number of ethnic communities live in Afghanistan. Amid such diversity in the country, the survival of secular character is also reflected through the existence of Bamian Budhas before the reign of the Taliban. The showing of the English and Hindi films in the cinema hall at Herat is another example in favour of the secular character of Afghanistan.

X

This passage sums up the powerful message of *The Kite Runner* as well as *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. “History, or memory, is not perfect in recounting events”
and “there is no correct version of truth or history” (Schurer 66), but it is for the most part logical – just like Hosseini’s novels are – as long as these works do not deviate too much or fall into one of the plot’s uncompleted stories. It means Hosseini has hinted that the readers should decide the manner a story is told. An important characteristic of both The Kite Runner and A Thousand Splendid Suns is the emphasis of these works on the impact left by the Taliban rule in its different stages on the people of the country rather than on journalistic and realistic details of their society. Khaled Hosseini makes an honest effort to comprehend the forces of contemporary history and their effects on individual human beings. Instead of shedding light on events of these novels, he sheds light on human beings who are caught up in the events. The novels reflect the complete ethos of Afghan people during Afghanistan’s struggle for getting rid of the Taliban rule. It is noteworthy to mention another aspect which is commonly found in both the novels that the motto of the Taliban rule was provoked by the thought of revenge. Being harassed during the regime of the communist rule, the Taliban had opted to take revenge as soon as they come to power. But in most of the cases the common people suffered the most whether it was during the communist period or under the Taliban regime. For instance, in A Thousand Splendid Suns, while pronouncing the sentence on Mariam, the judge narrated the incident of how his father became the victim of the communist government already mentioned above. It shows that the judge is guided by his whims to take revenge rather than giving justice to Mariam. Assef, who represents the Taliban in the The Kite Runner, too linked his father’s harassment at the hands of the communists with his choice to join the Taliban. As the stress in these political novels is portrayal of human beings, their character, enthusiasm and ambitions, these stories become etched in memory. To sum up I must quote Mohammad Asim Siddiqui, who aptly says that:
“If it is the job of literature to present a felt experience, then Khaled Hosseini succeeds in making his readers experience the horrors of life in Afghanistan in the last few decades” (Siddiqui 72).
Works Cited


