CHAPTER FOUR

Examining Gendered Violence in Monica Ali’s Brick Lane and Khaled Hosseini’s A Thousand Splendid Suns

Chapter three focussed on political violence in terms of violence that takes place in the public domain. This chapter will examine the kind of violence that takes place in the private sphere or within the home, that which is commonly termed as ‘domestic’ violence. Although the term domestic violence encompasses violent conduct towards women, children, elders and others who are infirm or unable to defend themselves, this chapter restricts itself to domestic violence against the female gender. It examines how among the many manifestations of violence, domestic violence is one of the most cruel: it takes place in a seemingly secure environment and is inflicted by someone who is expected to be a protector. The chapter will explicate further that in this form of violence, women are victims of cruelty inflicted by members of their own family. The later part of the chapter will analyse the depiction of violence against women in the chosen novels. The texts under study are Brick Lane (2003) and A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007).

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, The Connotation, Classification and Range of Violence Against Women (4.1), discusses that domestic violence is widespread and, contrary to common perception, is endemic to all sections of society. It examines the various forms that domestic violence takes. It explains that domestic violence is not simply physical use of force but is also psychological harm and sexual exploitation.

The next section, Analysing Domestic Violence in Monica Ali’s Brick Lane (4.2) analyses the experiences of women in a patriarchal setup with the accompanying violent behavior, discriminations and inequalities. It examines these in the light of physical violence, mental violence, double standards of patriarchy and sexual exploitation in the diasporic location as well as in the home country. It scrutinizes how women are conditioned to accept the significant role
played by fate in their lives, their unquestioning acceptance of their fate as absolute and their endorsement of their own suffering, before they realize the power to take action that lies suppressed within them.

The third section, *Domestic Violence in Khaled Hosseini’s A Thousand Splendid Suns (4.3)* takes on a study of the depiction of domestic violence in Khaled Hosseini’s work. Apart from the violence and ravages of war, a great deal of this kind of violence is portrayed through the account of the women in Afghanistan. The plight of the country and the women in it runs parallel. Both are damaged by violence but survive nevertheless. This part examines the various kinds of violence that are perpetrated on women under the forces of patriarchy. Spanning the range of women’s lives in Afghanistan from the pre-Taliban era to the post-Taliban period, this section addresses the different forms of violence the women undergo—physical, sexual and emotional or psychological which makes their lives a chronicle of constant violence. It also suggests that bonds of a common identity are formed by the women to combat the violence that they face jointly.

Women experience violence as wives and citizens, acceptance of brutality ia a cultural phenomenon which promotes their inferior position and denies them any permissible recourse. This is elaborated upon by Preeti Mishra in *Domestic Violence Against Women: Legal Control and Judicial Response* (2006): “What sets out domestic violence from other forms of violence against women is that it occurs within the framework of intimate relationships in a situation of dependency, making reporting and access to legal aid and other support services difficult” (xxv). Domestic violence has been compared to custodial violence, as the very person who is supposed to protect the woman from harm is generally the perpetrator of the damage to the person he is guarding. It defies the belief that the family is always a safe refuge from an unsafe world. In this form of violence, cruelty against women is commonly perpetrated not by a stranger on the street but the partners, who have taken the vows of love and honour at the time of marriage. Women suffer the physical and psychological consequences and put up with the pain and terror silently. Their hurt is multiplied by the threefold awareness that the
assailant is someone whom they love, the family which was perceived as an arena of love, affection, gentleness and a centre of solidarity and warmth becomes a centre for mistreatment and, this happens in the place they consider to be a safe haven, their own homes.

4.1 The Connotation, Classification and Range of Violence Against Women

Domestic violence is commonly considered a minor type of violence by society. However, such violence can be unrestrained and brutal. Due to domestic violence, women remain in a position of weakness and servility and are therefore susceptible to exploitation and violence against their selves. The family becomes a centre for mistreatment, assault and violence, ranging from slapping, hitting, to even homicidal assault. “Those victimized suffer physically and psychologically. They are unable to make their own decisions, voice their own opinions or protect themselves and their children from further repercussions. Their human rights are denied and their lives are stolen from them by the ever-present threat of violence” (UNICEF, The Innocenti Digest, 2000). The harmful and life threatening effects of traditional and cultural practices that continue under the guise of cultural and social conformism and religious beliefs are manifested in the form of female genital mutilation, dowry-related violence, acid attacks, killing in the name of honour, early marriages, deprivation and discriminations in terms of allottement of nutritional, health and educational resources. Domestic violence is a health, legal, economic, educational, developmental and above all, a human rights issue.

Traditionally, domestic violence has been condoned or considered to be an issue that can be sorted out within the four walls of the house. C. Vani states in “Gender and Violence, The Role of Media” (2005): “Not all violence committed in the world is considered criminal in the sense that victims of violence are adequately protected by the legislative system or tradition” (1, 2). Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women's human rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets. Moreover,
when the violence takes place within the home as is very often the case, the abuse is effectively condoned by the tacit silence and the passivity displayed by the state and law-enforcing machinery. In fact, some amount of violence is even considered normal in the course of a marriage. Terry Davidson in “Wife Beating: A Recurring Phenomenon Throughout History” (1977) has pointed out that “marital violence” was considered “his privilege” by a man and that historically a man could go unpunished for beating up his wife (4). Wife beating has been a persistent occurrence all through history. A battering-battered relationship was accepted as destined and correct by many women in the past and still is customary in some regions and classes of the world. Elizabeth M. Schneider in Battered Women and Feminist Lawmaking (2000) adds to this view: “Domestic Violence is seen as appropriate chastisement directed towards an inferior, but in actuality it is criminal abuse” (22). Many women themselves often agree with the idea that men have the right to discipline their wives, if necessary by force. Such views have gained widespread acceptance amongst the general population, the bureaucracy, judiciary and other organizations of the state and domestic violence remains an issue that is not addressed seriously. It is therefore a hushed, silent crime.

However, the effects of such cruelty on the victim are extreme. Jurists and human rights experts and activists have argued that the physical, sexual and psychological abuse inflicted on women is comparable to torture in both its nature and severity. Domestic violence against women leads to far-reaching physical and psychological consequences, some with fatal outcomes. While physical injury represents only a part of the negative health impacts on women, it is among the more visible forms of violence. Assaults result in injuries ranging from bruises and fractures to chronic disabilities and burns may lead to disfigurement or even death. The impact on the mental health of women is severe. Ann Jones has evaluated the consequences of such violence in Next Time She’ll Be Dead, Battering & How to Stop It, (2000): “Many veterans of family violence suffer recurrent, paralyzing flashbacks, just like war veterans, afflicted with the same psychiatric disorder: post-traumatic stress” (1). The impact of violence on women's mental health leads to severe consequences. Battered women have a high incidence of stress and stress-related illnesses such as post-traumatic stress
syndrome, panic attacks, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, elevated blood pressure and low self-esteem. “For some women fatally depressed and demeaned by their abuses, there seems to be no escape from a violent relationships except suicide” (UNICEF, Innocenti Digest, 2000). The severity of the consequence of domestic violence could even be fatal.

Domestic violence against women is almost a universally pervasive social problem. It is present in every country, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity and age. Nandita Kaushal in “Global Perspective of Domestic Violence against Women” (2009) discusses domestic violence against women as a problem that persists throughout a woman’s existence. She proposes the life cycle of violence against women. According to Kaushal’s postulations, women can experience abuse and violence throughout their life cycle. In fact gendered violence can start before birth in the form of sex selective abortion, or female infanticide in cultures where a son is strongly preferred. During childhood violence against girls could include malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and education. Women could even go on to suffer throughout their adult lives physical and mental cruelty, battering, rape, harmful traditional practices like dowry-related violence, honour killings, And in later life widows and elderly women may also experience abuse. Thus the entire life of a female may turn out to be succession of vicious events designed to impinge on her freedom, self esteem and her life itself.

The existence of domestic violence was largely not even classified as a problem by the law until fairly recently. However, in current years there has been a greater understanding of the problem of domestic violence, its causes and consequences and an international consensus has developed on the need to deal with the issue. Only lately it has begun to be understood as such. Amit Singh in “Domestic Violence against Women: An Overview” (2005) reports: “The 1990s, in particular witnessed concentrated efforts on the part of the world community to legitimize and mainstream the issue. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993) accepted that the rights of women and girls are "an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights” (140, 141). Subsequently,
several United Nations Conferences (Vienna 1993; Cairo 1994; and Beijing 1995) recognized women’s rights as an undeniable part of universal human rights.

The UNICEF, Innocenti Digest reports: “In the 1990s, several factors contributed to significant changes in domestic violence legislation in many countries. Women's successful campaigning raised the profile of the issue of violence against women…As a result of the new awareness generated, laws on domestic violence were adopted in many countries”. In keeping with this, therefore, laws have begun to be formulated by the authorities in various countries including India. As the first step in enacting regulation, the scope and meaning of domestic violence against women needs to be defined. There is no universally accepted definition of domestic violence. However, the Declaration on the elimination of All forms of Violence against Women adopted by General Assembly of the U.N. on 20th December 1993 has defined violence against women as:

Violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (UNICEF, Innocenti Digest, 2000).

This was an important development. Amit Singh points out, “It is the first international human rights instrument to deal exclusively with violence against women, a ground breaking document that became the basis for many other parallel processes” (141, 2005). This definition interprets violence against women in a broad sense as physical, sexual, or psychological. It suggests the gender-based roots of violence, recognising that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which they are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. It enlarges the definition of violence, by including the physical and psychological harm done to women and includes acts in both private and public life. The Declaration defines violence against women as encompassing, but not limited to, three areas: violence accruing in the family, within the general
cerity, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. The Indian Penal Code too identifies discrimination and exploitation on the basis of gender as an offence.

In India, The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, defines domestic violence as follows:

Any act, omission or conduct of the respondent shall constitute domestic violence in case it-

(a) harms or injures or endangers the health, safety, life limb or well-being, whether mental or physical, of the aggrieved person or tends to do so and includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse; or

(b) harasses, harms, injures or endangers the aggrieved person with a view to coerce her or any other person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any dowry or other property or valuable security; or

(c) has the effect of threatening the aggrieved person or any person related to her by any conduct mentioned in clause (a) or clause (b); or

(d) otherwise injures or causes harm, whether physical or mental, to the aggrieved person. (11, 2007)

This definition too addresses the common misconception about violence as causing physical injury only. It recognizes that violent conduct can be expressed on the mental and verbal levels too. It can be conveyed in covert and indirect forms like deprivations, discriminations and obstructions imposed upon women, as well as the double standards practiced, which prevent victims from realizing their aims.

Domestic violence is not limited to the disadvantaged classes, as is commonly believed, but is a real problem for women in the privileged sections of society too. In the words of Maria Roy in *Battered Women: A Psychosociological*
Study of Domestic Violence, (1977) “The problem of battered women is not a new one. What is new is that it is just beginning to be recognized as an important social problem. Brutal husbands exist at many levels of society; they are not confined to the poor or working class. Rather, they are usually supporting their families, their wives financially dependent on them” (xi). Domestic violence exists at all levels of society and is related to notions of control and power.

The power equations are described by Preeti Mishra as follows: “Women constitute about one-half of the global population, but they are placed in various disadvantageous positions, due to gender difference and bias. They have been victims of violence and exploitation by the male dominated society all over the world” (xxv, 2006). Domestic violence is an exceedingly complex and cruel form of abuse, which is committed within the triangular forces of a psychological agenda, deep-seated power dynamic and socio-economic structure and these do not allow even the acknowledgement or recognition of this abuse. It is regarded as a private problem and this fact affords a social invisibility to this matter which makes it even more difficult to study and understand this subject. Heterosexual intimate violence is part of a larger system of coercive control and subordination, this system is based on structural gender inequality, all of which have impacted the woman’s choices or lack of these.

Many manifestations of violence against women are caused by the social structure of a patriarchal society. The composition of the familial and cultural norms and values as also the political and economic system of the society that they live in determines who will injure and who will endure. Women in such a setup are deprived of society’s benefits and are rendered more vulnerable to suffering than others. Structural violence establishes physical violence and women experience both. In all societies where patriarchal family structure prevails, women are protected by the patriarch from other men, but they become victims of men in their own families as the events depicted in both the narratives show. A woman is possessed by some male protector like a father, brother, husband or son in the patriarchal system. She is considered the property of the man, her own will or independent action is denied. Subhash Chandra Singh in “Gender Violence:
Some Contextual Issues” (2005) observes, “women are not entitled to exercise full control over their bodies and sexuality” (23). The concept of ownership legitimizes control over women's sexuality. Women's sexuality is also tied to the concept of family honour in many societies and cultures. Traditional norms in these societies allow the killing of daughters, sisters, and wives suspected of defiling the honour of the family by indulging in forbidden sex, or marrying without the consent of the family or co-habiting without the sanction of marriage. By the same logic, the honour of a rival ethnic group or society can be defiled by acts of sexual violence against its women.

In an attempt to generate possible answers, Maria Roy raises some relevant questions: “There are no simple answers to the complex questions about causes and solutions. Why does a man become violent, harming, and in some instances, murdering a person once loved by him? What makes a woman stay in the situation for years? What is the co-relation between wife-beating and crime in the streets? The answers are intricate” (xi, 1977). A woman’s subordinate status, her lack of economic independence, the presence of children in the matrimony have substantial impact in defining public issues and shaping attitudes of social forces and that of the woman trapped in such a situation. These approaches constitute some reasons for women staying in a violent relationship. The same motives are also the cause for this sort of violence going largely unreported in the past. In a society where such violence is condoned and victims are blamed, even accused of provocation, women who come forward with their testimonies do not find much support for their cause. This happens due to the forces of patriarchy which deem that women have to bear in silence to uphold their family reputation and the continuation of the children's maintainance. The putative form of family structure and concern for the children take precedence over the woman’s fears for her own security. But the harms experienced by women, such as intimate violence and sexual harassment that were previously buried by cultural complicity are beginning to come out of the closet. Rinki Bhattacharya who has studied this problem extensively reports in Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in India (2004):

Indian women living in the US have reported increasing cases of domestic abuse. In 2001, Maitri, an NGO for women in San
Francisco, attended to 1,500 calls, while Apna Ghar in Chicago received 1,000 calls. The Survey of Abuse in Family Environment collected data from 10,000 households in Delhi, Chennai, Bhopal, Lucknow, and Tiruvananthapuram to assess the extent of domestic abuse. Physical violence was reported at 26 percent for the urban areas and 20 percent for the rural areas. Psychological torture was 45 and 51 percent respectively. And, according to the report, this was just the “tip of the iceberg”. (24)

Patriarchal ideologies are general and may even be universal, so what is true of the Indian circumstances is also true of other countries and immigrants who live outside the geographical borders of their country as the culture of unchallenged male domination gets transported across the boundaries too and thus the violence continues. Depictions of domestic violence recur in the novels of many diasporic writers post 2001. Earlier the concerns in terms of expression of women’s experiences in the fiction of such writers were isolation of women in the new country that was home for them. New issues in the context of the developments that have taken place are gendered violence and its effect on the lives of women who suffer it. Therefore, this section undertakes to examine the representation of such violence in the novels under study. This chapter attempts to observe the acts of violence against women depicted in the chosen novels. The impact of the acts of domestic violence is felt on the entire family over the long term; part of the impact comes from the uncertainty that results from the attacks. These events disrupt the regularity of people’s lives and especially in a diasporic location where the victims are exposed to an alternate lifestyle; they hurt the women’s psyche more than physical harm. The texts under study are Monica Ali’s Brick Lane and Khaled Hosseini’s A Thousand Splendid Suns.

4.2 Analyzing Domestic Violence in Monica Ali’s Brick Lane

This section undertakes to examine Monica Ali’s novel Brick Lane (2003) from the perspective of the women characters. The novel recounts the experiences of women of Bangladeshi origin in the patriarchal setup with the accompanying
violent behavior, discriminations and inequalities. *Brick Lane* is the well-rendered tale of Nazneen, a young Bangladeshi woman given into an arranged marriage to Chanu Ahmed, a man twice her age. Chanu takes her to London, where he has lived and worked for almost two decades. Bruce King in *World Literature Today* (2004) comments that: The novel is also part of a growing literature written by immigrant women from the Indian subcontinent about the problems of their adjustment to England… their rebellion against their traditional roles and community, and their discovery of their individuality and ability to make decisions. (91). Themes of cultural alienation, immigrant experience and personal growth dominate the work. Nazneen not only has to learn to live with Chanu, but she has to survive in a completely new culture as well. She is sent to England at the age of 18, with little knowledge of English, to live with her new, and to her, unappealing husband, Chanu: “The man she would marry was old. At least forty years old. He had a face like a frog. They would marry and he would take her back to England with him” (17). She is trying to make sense of her life in London's gritty Tower Hamlets.

Set in the eponymous area of East London, *Brick Lane* switches occasionally to Bangladesh—the novel is inter-cut with letters from Nazneen's sister Hasina, who married for love and is struggling to make her own way in Bangladesh having left her abusive husband. It begins with the troubled birth of the central character, Nazneen, in 1967 in what was then known as East Pakistan and is now Bangladesh. After a short preamble, the greater part of the novel is concerned with the events after her arranged marriage. The story of her sister who remains in Bangladesh is delivered as an additional narrative through her letters. Geraldine Bedell in “Full of East End promise” (2003) argues, “the inclusion of her news means that the definition of belonging is put into further doubt: The pull of home, and the push of it, is dramatised by Hasina, Nazneen’s sister, who took her fate into her own hands and made a love match, only to see the marriage fall apart and her life spiral out of control”. Events in the novel show the kind of life that Hasina, a woman who tries to rebel against the rules laid down for her gender is forced to lead. “I am not waiting around suffering around. Let her suffer if she
like it” (159) says Hasina in response to Renu’s notions of enduring agony. The implication, here is only men have a right to independent deeds.

4.2.1 The Role of Fate in Brick Lane

By referring to the theme of fate repeatedly in this narrative and by showing the part it plays in the lives of the women characters, Monica Ali critiques the hold of fate on the psyche of women. The two epigraphs are important organs in the body of the text intended to reveal the important aspects of the work. These self-explanatory quotations citing Ivan Turgenev and Heraclitus are used to set the tone of the narrative. The predominant premise of fate and the possibility of challenging it is indicated in the epigraphs. The first epigraph, an excerpt from Turgenev, for example, encourages a consideration of powerlessness and the loss of self. ‘Sternly, remorselessly, fate guides each of us; only at the beginning, when we’re absorbed in details, in all sorts of nonsense, in ourselves, are we unaware of its harsh hand.’ This locates the magnitude of the role of fate in the lives of the characters, especially the women in the novel. They are aware of the destiny that is steering the course of their lives and their ability to act, but they accept their fate as reality. In his review for the New York Times, Michael Gorra in “East Enders” proposes that this negotiation with fate imbues the novel with a complexity that stretches beyond simplistic binary oppositions, Gorra writes, “Do we, can we, control our own lives? That question propels Ali’s book”. Events in the novel, especially the lives of the women characters address this important question.

The second epigraph by Heraclitus equates character to fate ‘A man’s character is his fate.’ This suggests a person’s spirit is made up of his fate, leaving very little or nothing to free will. At the very outset, the role of fate in the protagonist’s life is spelled out. When Nazneen is born Ali describes her as ‘dead’ (12), her mother as ‘bereaved’ (13). Unfolding the time of Nazneen’s birth further the author lets the readers know that Nazneen who was thought to be stillborn by the midwife, Banesa comes to life when her aunt, Mumtaz, fortuitously drops her: “Mumtaz took hold of Nazneen, who was still dangling by the ankle, and felt the
small, slick torso slide through her fingers to plop with a yowl onto the bloodstained mattress. A yowl! A cry! Rupban scooped her up and named her before she could die nameless again” (13). This fact assumes importance in the light of further developments when the frail baby, born blue and assumed at first to be dead, is left to her fate instead of being given medical attention. The baby’s mother, Rupban says: “We must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way, she will be stronger” (14). This brings out the nature of Nazneen’s future life and the role of fate in it, or rather the acceptance of it that she is taught at an early age.

In a setup, such as this, action or agency is denied to the female gender and this message is internalized well by them. Lena Dominelli in Women and Community Action (2006) elaborates upon the makeup of fate and forces that are in opposition to it like agency: “Agency is the capacity to take action as a subject, determining the direction of life and making decisions about it. Its enactment involves an interactive process whereby an individual is configured as a subject of action rather than an object that is at the receiving end of another behaviour, and is linked to empowerment that promotes egalitarian power relations” (46). In order to take charge of one’s life, a person has to be identified with active delivery and the capacity to take action rather than as a passive recipient.

In society both kinds of tendencies are found. In fact equality in a society is measured by the way people interact. Dominelli continues: “In egalitarian relations, all participants are subjects who interact with other subjects. In relations of domination, the privileged person is the subject while the other is constructed as an object or subjugated person” (46, 2006). Dominelli’s explication shows that in a patriarchal society women do not believe in becoming subjects of action and can only be acted upon by the others, the leading males. Dominelli brings out the enfeeblement of the female mind by male dominated attitudes when she postulates “Agency is also gendered. Women are assumed to lack agency. Configuring women as passive victims of social forces denies them agency, discounts their capacity to become leaders defining the parameters within which action occurs
and affirms their dependent status as victims. This makes it easier for men to assume leadership roles without having to justify doing so” (47, 2006). Dominelli’s views find validation in *Brick Lane*.

At the time of Nazneen’s birth, her mother makes her commitment to fate known in the manner in which she decides to leave her child to the hands of fate, agency is construed as a useless struggle against fate which can only serve to weaken the agent. Acceptance of fate unreservedly on the other hand is a valuable attribute. This attitude makes known the conditioning of women by the hidden forces of patriarchy to accept the discriminations practised against them. Since trying to change their situation involves action and agency, it is better to agree to passive acceptance. This is the situation of Nazneen in the novel, she has learnt to allow fate to rule her life and later, away from her native land she confronts the potency of agency. In an interview with Neela Sarkaria, Monica Ali explains, “Nazneen’s central dilemma is this question of what she can control in her life, and when is it better to accept things. For her it is social, cultural, religious, and part of her family background”. Nazneen’s predicament is also a universal problem as Monica Ali continues to explain in the same interview: “But we all deal with that very same issue. It is a fundamental human question. In the UK and the West and I’m sure in America too, we see the external manifestation of this dilemma.” This finds expression in the environment around as Monica Ali carries on: “On the one hand we have all of these self-help books, suggesting that we are in control of our lives. On the other hand, we have this increasing awareness of what is predetermined in our lives. Whether it is genetic science, or Freud telling us you are the way you are. Added to that we have this interest in meditation and spirituality and finding your inner peace”. People experience this in diverse ways, Ali elaborates in the same interview: “We all veer around various readings of this. We say "well if it's meant to be it'll happen," but on the other hand we're constantly making lists of what we want to achieve and what we want to do. So yes, the question is the same for Nazneen, she just talks about them in different ways”. This universal matter becomes for Nazneen and her mother a compelling experience and the novel relates this verity.
The fact that fate is spelled with a capital ‘F’, in the communication of Rupban, Nazneen’s mother further indicates the role played by fate in their lives. The powerlessness of the women in such a setup, the lack of choices to change their lot that is seen in the life story of Rupban who is prone to crying and suffering like a saint is in evidence lucidly in the account: “‘Your mother is a saint’ said Abba. 'Don’t forget that she comes from a family of saints’” (80). In the arrangement of the society depicted in the novel, women have no choice except to accept their fate for their condition has to be borne and endured. This message is learnt well by Rupban and other women like her who suffer all that fate assigns to them.

Nazneen’s mother and her behaviour is an important indicator of all that women are made to endure and their indoctrination in the regulations of providence. Nazneen’s memories about her mother make known the extent of this attitude. “Just wait and see, that's all we can do. How often she had heard those words. Amma always wiped away her tears with those words. When the harvest was poor, when her own mother was taken ill, when floods threatened, when Abba disappeared and stayed away for days at a time. She cried because crying was called for, but she accepted it, whatever it was. 'Such a saint' Abba said. And then she died, and in dying proved life unpredictable and beyond control” (46). The only choice that they have in the face of such a life is to choose death like a martyr as Nazneen’s mother does. Elizabeth Schneider in Battered Women and Feminist Lawmaking (2002) explains this, “When people become victims, become "battered woman", claim sexual harassment or claim discrimination generally, they assume superhuman dimensions and thus become the focus of unrealistic expectations” (78). This is exactly true about Nazneen’s mother who becomes more than an ordinary woman, in becoming the undeviating sufferer, she becomes somehow extraordinary—a saint. From all appearances, Nazneen's mother, Rupban commits suicide. Nazneen’s aunt, Mumtaz finds her, "leaning low over the stacks of rice in the store hut, staked through the heart by a spear. There are several questions 'Your mother was wearing her best sari!' said Mumtaz 'It’s strange. It wasn't a special day, after all' ” (46). And then “‘I don't know why those spears were in the store, and wedged like that, so dangerous’” (216). These unanswered
queries point strongly to the mental condition of Rupban, of the things that forced her to take her own life.

Moreover, Both Amma and her sister cry and suffer in silence: “'If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men’” (80). Rupban is a strong believer in fate, she considers: “It was her place to sit and wait” (101). In fact, her conditioning to undergo torment merely due to her gender has hardened Rupban, to undergo suffering to such an extent that she is also called the “best mourner” of the village (137). Additionally, “'we will suffer in silence’” (102) and “We are women. What can we do?” (103) is one of her and her sister’s often used expressions. These terms are evidence for the deep rooted conviction in suffering and misery that women are required to endure by virtue of being women: “What were they suffering? Nazneen wanted to ask” (103). After some deliberation, she divines “It was something with being a woman. Of that much she was sure” (103). But she too does not ask any questions or get any answers, such is the extent of women’s indoctrination, of acceptance, of absolute reverence and respect for fate which decrees that only women must bear suffering and endure pain.

Nazneen grows up hearing the story of “How You Were Left to Your Fate” (15), “fighting against one’s Fate can weaken the blood. Sometimes or perhaps most times it can be fatal” (15). Jaya Banerji (2003) elaborates on the circumstances of Nazneen’s birth, “The story of her birth becomes the leitmotif of Nazneen's life. She clings to it and lives by her mother's belief that in all events she must accept the Grace of God for what cannot be changed must be borne”. Brought up on such a diet of fatalism, she learns not to question the logic of her mother’s wisdom, her tearful stoicism and her acceptance of suffering. Internalizing this message soundly, Nazneen tells her aunt, “I have no complaints or regrets to tell you” as “I tell everything to God” (15). That code regulates her life. Nevertheless, subsequent events in the novel reveal it as a meditation on fate and free will. Fate, a power that is believed to control events is constantly at play with human agency, the capacity for human beings to make choices and to impose these choices on the world. This can be observed in Nazneen’s dealings and that
of various other characters in the novel and finds culmination in reason, which can be termed as the ability to think and make judgments. However, this is not so simplistic and involves more than just the ability to believe, it also entails the need to solve problems and seek the truth as Nazneen does particularly in the closing stages of the story. Sukhdev Sandhu in “Come hungry, leave edgy” (2003) discusses Nazneen’s progress in the novel: “It tracks the process, by which she moves, fitfully and self-laceratingly, from shame to tentative self-possession, from a willing submission to a belief in her own agency, from a silence both voluntary and culturally conditioned to a yell of liberation.” This traces the change in the character of Nazneen as the novel progresses.

Initially Nazneen’s character has the element of trust in fate. This excessive dependence on fate is also the hamartia or the tragic flaw that led to her mother’s killing of herself. Hasina’s tragic flaw is her hubris which compels her to seek the love and happiness which eludes her time and again. The events throughout the novel can be contemplated upon. Are the lives of the major characters the product of chance or of predestination, of human agency or of powerlessness? In other words, could the protagonist, Nazneen affect her own life, or the life of others through her rational will? Or is the influence merely incidental? And regardless of whether Nazneen is in fact powerless to consciously control the tides of history, does her undeniable influence bear the mark of chance, or is there sufficient evidence to make the reader suspect the existence of inescapable fate? Finally, are these choices or non-choices, random or predestined acts and events merely an illusion in her imagination? Ali introduces readers to Nazneen’s contradictory sense of agency and fate: “Oh you think it would be simple, having made the decision long, long ago; to be at the beck and call of fate, but how to know which way it is calling you? And there was each and every day to be got through. If Chanu came home this evening and found the place untidy and the spices not even ground, could she put her hands like so and say, don’t ask me why nothing is prepared, it was not I who decided it, it was fate. A wife could reasonably be beaten for a lesser offence” (22). It is significant to note that all this takes place in a modern city like London.
Events in Bangladesh are also open to similar deliberation. In London, Nazneen is not free of worry on behalf of her sister, Hasina. Her worry is two-fold; first, she would like to meet Hasina again, besides the worry also turns into consideration about the nature of fate itself and a contemplation of human agency. Nazneen’s thoughts in this matter are revealing. “It worried her that Hasina kicked against fate. No good could come of it. Not a single person could say so, But then if you really looked into it, thought about it more deeply, how could you be sure that Hasina was not simply following her fate? If fate cannot be changed, no matter how you struggled against it, then perhaps Hasina was fated to run away with Malek. Maybe she struggled against that and that was what she could not alter” (22). The suppositions of some feminist critics are pertinent here, Elizabeth Schneider postulates, “Women’s victimization and agency are each understood to exist as the absence of the other as if one must be either pure victim or pure agent when in fact they are profoundly inter-related” (76, 2000). This explains the actions of the two sisters and of other female characters including Nazneen’s mother. The “all-agent or all-victim conceptual dichotomy” has been criticized by others like Martha Mahoney too: “Neither victimization nor agency should be glorified, understood as static, viewed in isolation or perceived as an individual or personal issue” (Cited in Schneider, 2000, 76). Viewed in this manner, events in the novel, particularly the course of survival that Nazneen’s life and that of those who interact with her takes can be better examined and comprehended.

The mind-set of women under the laws of patriarchy can be explained by their training. They are so indoctrinated by these regulations that they fail to see the power within themselves, the ability to take matters in their own hands lies unused and they accept victimhood as their lot. This makes certain that they do not fight back in the face of violence on the domestic front that they may be put through. This state of affairs is seen in the novel too. Although, Initially Nazneen starts with the idea that she is largely unable to affect the world in a true sense, there is enough ambiguity for the characters themselves and for readers to visualize other possibilities. The young Nazneen is a firm believer in fate and inevitability yet she also refuses to give up her sense of autonomy and agency. Nazneen’s underlying childhood belief in fate and predestination as
something real and prescribed, and also as an element outside of human control progresses to her conviction weakened by her experiences and moves on to a firm belief in human agency. In the final chapters of the novel, the readers have evidence that Nazneen Ahmed is indeed able to influence her own life and the lives of others through premeditated acts in her life.

*Brick Lane* is a tale of empowerment as readers soon discern. Nazneen’s education in fate starts at birth, she is taught to accept, to endure and has no complaints. The practice of protest is alien to her. Ali uses the technique of foreshadowing here. She leaps across years in Nazneen’s life and states: “What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle and challenge so that when at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away when she had a futile husband and had been fated a young and demanding lover, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye” (16). This prediction reveals to readers the image that Nazneen will eventually see of herself. The rule of fate and destiny in her life is powerful at this point. Nazneen still believes that she has no autonomy. Yet, later she will choose to shut Karim and Mrs Islam out of her life and choose to keep her plans of not accompanying Chanu to Bangladesh a secret. But perhaps Ali has been sufficiently explicit on the matter of Nazneen’s sense of the level of autonomy from fate: Nazneen, perennial victim, endures in seeing herself as protagonist. Of course, the strongest piece of evidence for Nazneen’s autonomous ability to influence events as a legitimate protagonist on a personal level is her decision to stay back in England. When Ali introduces us to Nazneen’s contradictory sense of agency and fate, fate has never been unwilling to lend a hand in the course of her life. The result of this confluence of agency and destiny eventually becomes clear and agency emerges the winner. Apart from this, Hasina recounts her parents in one of her letters: “I think of Amma too … You remember what Abba used to call? … He go to other women. He want to take other wife but she give threat to kill own self.” (156). So in the final analysis, Amma too takes her fate in her own
hands and, refusing to endure any more suffering, to accept her fate, as she did for her daughter, she finally ends her life.

Nazneen moves to London and, for years, keeps house, cares for her husband, and bears children, just as a girl from the village is supposed to do. Impressed by its stacking side-tables, patterned wallpaper and framed certificates testifying to her new husband’s proficiency in cycling and transcendental philosophy, Nazneen rarely leaves the flat at first, but when she does, she observes London with an alien’s bewildered curiosity. But gradually she is transformed by her experience, and begins to question whether fate controls her or whether she has a hand in her own destiny. Motherhood is a catalyst; Nazneen abides by the lesson from her mother for most of her life, but begins to grow out of it, most noticeably when she decides not to leave her sick son, Raqib to his fate, but rushes him to the hospital for treatment. Nevertheless, the son dies in spite of the fact that the mother takes matters into her own hand and tries to save him. Later, Nazneen gives birth to two daughters, Shahana and Bibi. The two girls, particularly the elder one, are irritated by their father’s traditions and pride. The mother’s love for the daughters and her desire for their happiness induce Nazneen to take charge, to decide the course of her own and her daughters’ lives. She learns to think in terms of her own point of view and not just give in to the wishes of the father, Chanu who wants to go back: “But for my part, I don’t plan to risk these things happening to my children. We will go back before they get spoiled” (32). To her own amazement, Nazneen falls in love with a young man in the community. She discovers both the complexity that comes with free choice and the depth of her attachment to her husband, her daughters, and her new world. This outlines Nazneen’s journey along her path of self-realization.

Although she comes from a traditional background from Bangladesh, a country where culture favours dominant males and submissive women, where wife beating is considered the norm by most women too as evidenced in the novel, Monica Ali depicts the changes that take place in Nazneen and other female characters around her. The women come to terms with their position as Bangladeshis living in the modern city of London where they are acquainted with
a better status for women but expected to follow the culture of the homeland. An inevitable part of that acceptance of fate is the acceptance of the gendered violence, as Nazneen's thoughts testify. “Chanu had not beaten her yet, He showed no signs of wanting to beat her. In fact he was kind and gentle. Even so it was foolish to assume he would never beat her” (22). This goes to show that some degree of physical violence is anticipated in every marriage. Such is the custom that the action of the novel depicts. Therefore it comes as no surprise that many women characters in the novel are victims of this kind of violence. The next section examines the way in which physical violence is depicted by Monica Ali in her account.

4.2.2 Correspondence of Physical Violence Between Home Country and Host Country

In this novel physical violence finds depiction most noticeably in the letters that come from Bangladesh. The letters relate the experiences of the women in Bangladesh under the patriarchal society. Walter Raleigh in On Writing And Writers (1927) explicates: “Letters are a part of the social machinery, by means of which persons are put in relation with one another” (36). Letters are used in the novel to establish the sisterly bond between the two siblings, Nazneen and Hasina as also the connection between the home country, Bangladesh and the diasporic location, London. Letters from Bangladesh appear at several places in the novel and help to take the story forward. Most of the letters are written by Hasina to Nazneen and a few are sent by Nazneen in reply from London. Apart from this letters are sent by Chanu as well in the later part of the novel when he returns to Bangladesh. Chapter Seven (p 146-177) is made up entirely of letters that span thirteen years, from May 1988 to January 2001. This series of letters from Hasina to Nazneen chronicles her life and that of her sister over that period. Therefore, Hasina's life in Bangladesh and Nazneen's life in London go forward through the medium of the letters. In this way, the letters give both kinds of news, reports of Hasina in various parts of the home country and news of Nazneen and her condition in the diasporic location in London. Nazneen gives birth to two daughters in the course of these letters. Hasina’s letters reveal her story in first
person and in this way her account is foregrounded, her predicament becomes the focus of direct attention. In a novel otherwise told in third person and mainly from Nazneen’s point of view, these letters allow the reader to hear the other character’s voice more intimately. They also give an impression of accuracy and authenticity to the tales of the women spoken about. The epistolary technique is an excellent way for the character's feelings to be portrayed without breaking the point of view, or having to reveal it through dialogue between characters and author, Monica Ali makes good use of this characteristic of the epistolary method. The main idea seems to be that the stories of the women get a voice; readers get an insight into the problems and the ordeals that women go through in this setup.

Hasina herself is a victim of physical domestic violence. Readers are introduced to this harsh reality early in the story (Chapter one, p 25). In her first letter to Nazneen, in fact, Hasina recounts “Everything good between us now, I do not let my tongue make trouble for it as my husband say. Just because man is kind to wife it do not mean she can say what she like. If women understanding this no one will beat” (25). Clearly according to this scheme of things, beatings are brought upon themselves by the women who do not hold their tongue and bear in silence. Preeti Misra explains: “A woman who is battered is given to understand that it is her fault” (150, 2006). Of course the physical violence in the form of beatings continues and in fact becomes more severe as it is not the woman, Hasina who is at fault but rather the violent temperament of her husband, Malek. Abdul Majeed Mulla in “Domestic Violence against Women” (2009) states about the person responsible for domestic violence, “The abuser is responsible. They do not have to use violence. They can choose instead, to behave non violently and foster a relationship built on trust, honesty, and respect.” (220). The man does not consider himself as the perpetrator of his offensive action but rather that he is the helpless agent who is forced to chastise the woman for her misbehaviour. Victims of violence do not like to be abused, they have the same expectations of love, trust and a fulfilling relationship that Mulla validates. Hasina too has similar expectations and this prompts her to leave the vicious situation. She writes in a later letter “In morning soon as husband go out for work I go away to Dhaka. Our landlady Mrs. Kashem is only person who know about it. She say it is better get
beaten by own husband than beating by stranger. But those stranger not saying at same time they love me. If they beat they do in all honesty” (58). Mrs. Kashem endorses the patriarchal view that physical violence from the husband is more desirable than running away from him and is considered a lesser form of violence. Rinki Bhattacharya affirms: “Violent behaviour in men is condoned with convenient excuses that are too many to recount” (25, 2004). Even another woman finds the hypocrisy practiced by the men in such a situation acceptable. The husband tells his wife that he loves her but his actions prove otherwise, yet, according to women like Mrs Kashem, this violence should be overlooked by women like Hasina. Leaving the abusive husband and running away is not a good decision. Several times in subsequent incidents, Hasina suffers different kinds of violence – physical, mental, sexual, etc. But her story pales in comparison to that of her friend, Monju, who has to bear even more potent forms of cruelty.

Monju was married at the age of thirteen to a man involved in child trafficking. Her husband wanted to sell her baby when it was seven days old. When Monju refuses to yield to this contemptible proposition, her husband throws acid on the week-old baby. The poor mother now starts saving to undo the damage caused to her child: “All money Monju beg pay for two operation for deform son” (333) writes Hasina in a letter. Monju’s story is the exemplification of increasing acid attacks on women in Bangladesh. Afroza Anwary in “Acid Violence And Medical Care in Bangladesh: Women’s Activism as Carework” makes some observations in this connection, “Acid attacks on women are increasing at alarming rates in Bangladesh, but the government has failed to provide medical care to the victims. Easily available sulfuric acid, which can mutilate a human face in moments, has emerged as a weapon used to disfigure a woman's body. By the mid-1990s, activists had documented acid attacks, and urban protests were followed by demands for better medical care” Anwary’s assertions are borne out in the text when Monju’s account is continued.

Later Monju’s husband threw acid on her too for the ‘crime’ of refusing to give him the money that she had saved for her son’s operation. Now she lies abandoned and alone in Dhaka Medical College Hospital on the verge of death.
Hasina describes her pitiable condition “when I walk close is bad odour emitting from thing be on mattress. I must put hand over nose and mouth… Left eye is narrow and stuff come out cheek and mouth is melt and ear have gone like dog chew off… Hearing is very small now… She say God give them the pain I suffering now. Mouth cavity shrinking from which she cannot cry or talk loud” (269, 270). This gruesome description of Monju’s condition shows the callousness of the husband, the perpetrator of the cruelty who has has deserted the mother and child in this abysmal state. Monju's money is all spent to save her life and this causes her more agony, “all she think is how to get more for the boy. This eat into her more painful than acid” (335). Motherhood and its accompanying responsibilities are so dominant in women that even on her death bed, Monju can only think of her son's well being. Finally there is no money for Monju’s medicines either but still the heartless husband and his family do nothing to help until she finally dies one day. Thus for Monju too only death can relieve her of her suffering.

Other women’s stories are revealed in Hasina’s letters. Aleya's husband causes problems for her by inflicting physical violence. Hasina writes: “Aleya's husband give beating. Last month gone she best worker in factory and get bonus. They give a sari and for this sari she take beating. Foot come all big like marrow and little finger broken. Bending over her stomach give trouble. Renu say at least you have husband to give good beating at least you not alone. The husband say he will, beat twice each day until she tell name of the man” (157). Here again, the subordinate status of women in the Bangladeshi patriarchal system is apparent, the wife has to bear and endure the repeated oral and physical thrashings of the husband for working outside the house to support her family. Sara Hossain and Hameeda Hossain in *Feminism and Feminist Movement in Bangladesh* (2002) write about the societal structure in Bangladesh, “The ideological basis and mechanisms that legitimise, maintain, and perpetuate sexism are deeply embedded in the Bangladeshi social structure. Male domination and women's subordination are basic tenets of social relations in Bangladesh” (5). These assertions describe the tenets of a male-dominated social structure that is characteristic of every patriarchal society.
When Hasina is living with Ahmed, she encounters more physical violence: “Another wife have taken beating. Thank God for one rib only broken, when my husband beat he make sure to break all bones” (174) says one of the women who lives in the same neighbourhood. So a woman who has only one rib broken is considered to be lucky, such is the severity of the physical violence. Hasina’s letters are not the only source of violence against women. There is violence in London too as evidenced in the story of Amina who is asking her husband for a divorce. “I saw her with a split lip. And one time she had her arm in a sling. He must have gone too far this time” (71). This conversation between Nazneen and Razia depicts the important fact that physical violence is a common occurrence in Amina’s life, what is different this time is that her husband has gone too far.

These descriptions of physical violence serve to show the lives that women are forced to live in the prevailing patriarchal setup; this system operates not only in the motherland but is also transported to the diasporic site. For, in the course of the letters, at the same time as the lives of the women of Bangladesh are made known, the lives of the women in London like Amina, Razia and Nazneen are revealed too. Nazneen’s own powerlessness is documented as well. Hasina is suffering perhaps because she defied fate but Nazneen puts up with disappointments as well. Although she obediently went into an arranged marriage, she too is unhappy.

4.2.3. Psychological Violence Against Bangladeshi Women is Universal in Bangladesh and London

Psychological violence in Brick Lane comes into being largely due to the unequal social composition of society in Bangladesh. Rounaq Jahan in “Women in Bangladesh” (1975) states, “That a woman's status should be inferior to a man's is a thesis universally accepted by Bengali men” (14). In one of her letters, Hasina writes about her friend, Aleya’s troubles: “The husband say 'why should you work? If you work it looks bad. People will say he cannot feed her…He buy burkha for her and every day walking with her to factory. Evening there he is wait
at gate” (150). This reveals the attitude of men in such a social system. They cannot earn enough to support their families but still they do not want their wives to work outside the house. It is significant that the problems faced by Aleya in the home country seem to be a mirror reflection of Jorina's and Razia's problems, both of whom live in the diasporic space of London. In a discussion about the legal structure and the reality in their country, Bangladesh, Sara Hossain and Hameeda Hossain testify: "The constitution guarantees all citizens equal rights, which is also reflected in national policies and plan documents. However, in reality statistics show glaring disparities between men and women, rich and poor, and urban and rural dwellers in access to the development process both as agents and beneficiaries” (3, 2002). Women are not equal citizens but live a life of subordination within the four walls of their homes. Their function is primarily understood in terms of motherhood and child-bearing. Rounaq Jahan stresses that, “From her childhood a girl is trained to fit into the only socially acceptable role, that of wife and mother” (7, 1975). The structure of the home country gets transported to the diasporic location also. Nazneen lives in a contemporary city like London and also has a more educated husband who prides himself in being better informed and more cultured than his country men whom he calls ‘ignorant types.’ Yet she is not immune to the power of the definite designs of a patriarchal arrangement. Monica Ali depicts this in the behavior of Chanu. He impresses upon his daughters, Ali writes: “'It is lucky for your mother,' Chanu told the girls, 'that I am an educated man' ” (192). Nazneen herself is convinced of her good fortune: “'It was lucky for me' – her heart swelled as she spoke – 'that my father chose an educated man' ” (459). Here, again the women has internalized her inferior status and Nazneen feels pleased with the token privileges that she enjoys.

Although, her position is certainly better in comparison to the women in Bangladesh, still there are many instances of psychological violence in Nazneen’s account too. The patriarchal oppression in the case of women and that of Nazneen also is such that there is acceptance of the confining position they have to occupy. The space in a big city like London for Nazneen is very small as it is limited to her small flat in Tower Hamlets. She finds this claustrophobic but does not see this as unfairness or even discrimination since she is brought up in a setting where space
is limited to the interior for women, they are confined to their homes. on a diet of acceptance of fate, of having to wait for things to happen. The outside world is not a part of Nazneen’s destiny; it is not open to her. Hossain and Hossain (2002) discuss the situation in Bangladeshi society: “In many areas, men mediate between women and the world outside, and married women have little contact with anything outside their homes and families. This is reinforced by women’s economic dependence on men, who typically control all of the household income” (5). In the novel, this state of affairs is carried to the diasporic site also. Nazneen is confined to the four walls of her marital home and is not allowed to go out: “She did not often go out. 'Why should you go out?' said Chanu. 'If you go out, ten people will say, I saw her walking on the street. And I will look like a fool. Personally, I don't mind if you go out but these people are so ignorant. What can you do?' She never said anything to this” (45). Here, Nazneen’s silence is significant and communicates that any opposition to Chanu’s standpoint is futile, thus highlighting the position of women once more.

Later on, to substantiate his point of view, Chanu talks about other women, especially the woman who lives above them and how they are confined to the four walls: “ 'Some of our women, they never go out. You never see her out, do you? Her'. He motioned upstairs with his head. 'She never goes out. You never see her out, do you?' ” (459). Also, when Nazneen expresses the desire to learn English: “ 'I would like to learn some English', said Nazneen. Chanu puffed his cheeks and spat the air out with a fuff. 'It will come. Don't worry about it. Where's the need anyway' ” (37). As if this is not enough to reflect his opinion on the status of women. Chanu states further: “ 'Many aren't allowed to work, You know how it is. Village attitudes. The woman gets some money, she starts feeling she is as good as the man and she can do as she likes'… 'That's how they think, they are not modern. Not like me' ” (459). What Chanu calls village attitudes is in actual fact the tenets of patriarchy at work.

Chanu’s expression of such views is shocking enough; Nazneen’s reaction to them is suggestive of the training of women, the acceptance of their fate. She does not take exception to this, does not object to it in any way. Lena Dominelli’s
remarks about the work of women are relevant here, “Society’s definition of masculinity and femininity are intricately connected to notions of work and what legitimately constitutes work” (160, 2006). The distribution of work co-relates to the inequitable practices of patriarchy. Work done by women inside the house is labour also but does not pay the women in hard cash; it is for that reason not considered real work. Dominelli maintains, “Paid work, especially its better paid and prestigious elements, belongs to men. Unpaid work in the home is generally a woman's lot. This idea pervades the social division of labour and the educational system in preparing people for social roles and the organisation of the family” (160, 2006). When the assertion is that women are not allowed to work, it means that they are not allowed to do work for which they would be paid. They do toil, however doing all the tedious work within the house. Hossain and Hossain discuss the position of women in Bangladeshi society. They assert: “Women are primarily expected to be wives and mothers engaged in undervalued work like reproducing and rearing children, cooking, cleaning and looking after the household. Otherwise, they are expected to work in areas considered suitable for women-teaching, sewing, knitting, crafts and embroidery, etc.” (6, 2002). The tiresome chores that do not bring in any remuneration, financial or otherwise are reserved for the women in a patriarchal setup. Dominelli is in agreement with this, she continues: “Housework has a large element of drudgery, and women’s waged work can be tedious, repetitive and monotonous” (167, 2006). Dominelli’s assertions confirm that women are made to do the tasks that involve drudgery, whether it is within the house or outside. The implication is that like their position in society, women’s work too is inferior. All this is reflected in the women characters of Brick Lane.

As Ali herself indicates, this situation holds true in both the home country and the diasporic location. Nazneen continues with all the dreary chores of personal grooming for her husband. “She was always cutting bits off him, the dead skin around his corns. His toenails, the fingernails of his right hand, because his left could not do the job properly. The finger nails of his left hand because she might as well do that while she had the scissors. The wiry hair that grew from the tops of his ears. And the hair on his head, once every six weeks when Chanu said,
'Better smarten me up a bit'” (91). Even though these little things do trouble her, Ali recounts: “Nazneen worked around the corn, there was a time when it disgusted her, this flaking and scraping, but now it was nothing” (182). She offers no resistance as these ideas and values have been ingrained into the women from the time that they are born. This is their conditioning and the woman does not resist the path chosen for her by her fate. There are other more filthy tasks she is expected to do routinely: “Nazneen had mopped up the overflow from the blocked toilet and washed her hands and sighed into the mirror” (209). However, there is no assertion of rights due to the extent of the psychological control in the patriarchal set-up. Jane Freedman in Feminism (2002), referring to the work of Hartman explains the reason for this: “Because women are often financially dependent on men, they cannot refuse to do this unpaid work in the home; and in a type of vicious circle, the fact that women do the unpaid work in the home acts as a barrier to their training and better employment” (50). In the story, Nazneen is clearly caught up in this circle. She cannot be the agent of any change in her situation, as subsequent events testify.“The days passed more easily now than at first. It was just a matter of waiting, as Amma always said. She had waited and now they passed more easily” (46). Here Nazneen becomes representative of other such women who also are not allowed to go out or to work and who have to perforce accept their situation.

With a sister lost in Dhaka, Nazneen encounters more mental cruelty from her husband, Charu. She is pregnant for the first time in an alien city, without her near and dear ones to comfort her. She is worried about her lost sister, which is only natural, but Charu who should know better pokes fun at her and replies sarcastically that he could go to Dhaka to look for Hasina, “I'm sure it would not take long to find her. Perhaps one or two lifetimes. And after all there is very little for me to do here. I only have a degree to finish and a promotion to get and a son on the way” (62). As if this is not enough mockery at his young, inexperienced wife who happened to just blurt out the request to him, he adds for good measure that he could bring back her whole family and Hasina to London and make a little village there. Later this episode gets repeated. This recurrence is Ali’s way of reinforcing the verbal abuse and rudeness that
Nazneen is subjected to by her ‘kind’ husband. Chanu does not allow his wife to send any money to her needy sister and additionally ridicules her emotions: “My sister. I would like to bring her here.’ Chanu waved his thin arms ‘Bring her. Bring them all. Make a village here!’ He shook his delicate shoulders in a show of laughter. 'Get a box and sow rice. Make a paddy on the windowsill. Everyone will feel at home' ” (183). The above occurrences illustrate how Chanu who often remarks that he is an educated man, and is proud of his “westernized” ways and who scorns the other inhabitants of Tower Estates as peasants, still subjects his wife to violence. The violence may not be physical but it is mental and the wife has no choice but to endure this treatment and be happy that he does not beat her up physically at least. “There was Chanu, who was kind and never beat her” (102). She is expected to be thankful for this. Furthermore, for her daughter, Shahana, Nazneen's words: “ 'Your father is a good man. I was lucky in my marriage' ” is equivalent to saying that the husband does not beat up his wife “ 'You mean he doesn’t beat you,' said Shahana” (303) in reply. Little Shahana who has been born and brought up in London knows the gender motivated traditions of her homeland.

Also, as evidenced at the time of Nazneen’s first pregnancy. Chanu speaks about the unborn child in male terms only: “I will tell Mr Dalloway, "Look here, I am about to have a son. I am going to be a father: Give me a proper job, fit for a real man, a father” ” (52), thus putting additional pressure on his young wife to bear a male heir. He goes on: “When my boy is born I will teach him some songs. Do you know that the child can hear even in the womb? If I sing to him now, when he is born he will recognize the tunes” (62). Facing such demands Nazneen cannot escape the anxiety of bearing a son, a male heir so necessary in the patriarchal system. A very strong gender bias, the hallmark of a patriarchal society is evident in this episode as well. Sons, are idolised, an obsession with a male heir cuts across all differences. Sons are considered ritually and economically advantageous, essential not only to look after their parents in old age but also to ensure continuation of the lineage and family name. Therefore, daughters are not only considered to be undesirable but are discriminated against: Sara Hossain and Hameeda Hossain assert: “Gender discrimination starts at birth and continues
through life” (5, 2002). In childhood, young girls are expected to follow the rules laid down for them, they are taught to be demure and dependent and look up to their fathers and brothers. In adulthood too, the practice goes on and they are expected to abide by the prescribed rules. Rouaq Jahan discussing the status of a girl child states: “That usually no *azan* [call for prayer] is given when a girl is born symbolizes the community's disinterest in the girl's arrival” (7, 1975). Apart from this, from early childhood there is asymmetrical allocation of food, health care, and social opportunities for girls. Jahan continues, “Girls are taught the two virtues-patience and sacrifice-of ideal Bengal womanhood. They also learn to accept the essentially inferior status of women in society” (7, 1975). The preparation of a female for playing a subservient and dependent role begins in childhood. She elaborates: “From early childhood on, girls are made fully conscious of the feeling that, unlike their brothers, they are liabilities” (7, 1975). Jahan’s statements expose the substandard position allocated to women and the discriminations practiced against them in their society. All this is corroborated in the account of Nazneen and other women characters taken up in the subsequent paragraphs.

Chanu’s flawed relationship with his elder daughter, Shahana, one of hate and love with each thinking selfishly of their own selves, affects Nazneen. It causes her to be worried about her family. This too can be considered a form of psychological anguish for the mother: “It was like walking through a field of snakes. Nazneen was worried at every step” (205). Often the mother feels accountable for any friction between the children and their father and she works hard to prevent any confrontation between the members of the family, she feels responsible for their well-being. Nazneen blames herself for any failure: “She had to concentrate hard to get through each day. Sometimes she felt as if she held her breath the entire evening. It was up to her to balance the competing needs, to soothe here and urge there, and push the day along its course. When she failed, and there was an eruption, a flogging or a tantrum or a tear-stained flat cheek, she felt dizzy with responsibility” (205). Chanu’s threats to his daughter, Shahana amount to psychological violence for his family: “Tell the little memsahib that I am going to break every bone in her body!...I’ll dip her head in boiling fat and
throw her out of that window. Go and tell the memsahib’ ” (180). Such intimidating language, used to threaten the defiant Shahana, stings both Nazneen and the younger daughter, Bibi: “Busy still with his epithets of torture…And Bibi hugged herself and was covered in pain, and a hand reached inside Nazneen's stomach and began to pull entrails up her throat…and Shahana took on his temper” (181). Chanu’s stinging remarks are never aimed at the rebellious Shahana directly but rather passed on through the medium of the other two females. In this way, both Nazneen and the younger daughter, Bibi get implicated in the struggle between father and elder daughter.

Moreover Nazneen thinks of her role of a housewife as compulsory work, of herself as indispensable. After her stay in the hospital, subsequent to her nervous breakdown-she is not angry with the mess that she finds her house in. Ali verbalizes: “Nazneen picked her way across the room without comment. It gave her some satisfaction. For years she had felt she must not relax. If she relaxed, things would fall apart. Only the constant vigilance and planning, the low level, unremarked and unrewarded activity of a woman, kept the household from crumbling” (329). This reflects the position of most women in their households; they have to do all the duties without any reward or appreciation. Without them, the house would not function normally but this is not acknowledged but rather taken for granted and they themselves seem to take pride in the menial work they have to do. So ingrained is the patriarchal system in Nazneen that during the time of Raqib’s hospitalization, when she realizes that Chanu is a good cook but had never offered to help her. “Chanu could cook. It had not occurred to her that, in all those years before he married, he must have cooked, And since, he had. only leaned on cupboards and rested his belly on the kitchen surfaces while she chopped and fried and wiped around him. It did not irritate her that he had not helped. She felt instead, a touch of guilt for finding him useless, for not crediting him with this surprising ability” (128). Even though he does not help her, it is Nazneen who feels in the wrong.

The way women are supposed to conduct themselves is decided for them. This is another form of mental harassment that they face. V. Geetha affirms in
Patriarchy (2007): “Patriarchy rests on defined notions of masculine and feminine, is held in place by sexual and property arrangements that privilege men’s choices, desires and interests over and above those of the women in their lives and is sustained by social relationships and cultural practices which celebrate heterosexuality, female fertility and motherhood on the one hand and valorise female subordination to masculine authority and virility on the other” (8). When Nazneen is lost in London, she remembers Razia's advice, “Razia always said, if you go out to shop, go to Sainsbury, English people don't look at you twice. But if you go to our shops, the Bengali men will make things up about you. You know how they talk, once you get talked about, then that's it. Nothing you can do” (59). And Nazneen thinks “Hasina would be talked about” (59). A woman cannot leave her husband's house, even if she is facing physical violence there, for fear of being 'talked about.' Even women who leave the four walls of their home to go to a shop get talked about by the men, things are made up about such women, and aspersions may be cast on their character.

Additionally, Chanu controls Nazneen’s actions—her friendships, etc. He is critical of a modern woman like Razia. “Razia, on the other hand I would not call a respectable type... Razia cuts her hair like a tramp” (83) he pronounces and asks Nazneen to be careful of his concerns about Razia and her family. Again Chanu's patronizing attitude is revealed when Nazneen deals with Mrs. Islam and her violent sons alone and is tidying up the shelf that the son broke: “But next time there's a big job to be done—leave it to me” (460). Furthermore, when men take advantage of a woman sexually the stigma is attached to the female who is the victim in such a situation. The woman who is expected to feel the shame for her condition of sexual exploitation, Nazneen informs Chanu about Hasina: “There has been some difficulty for her” (183). This is all Nazneen is willing to reveal about Hasina’s sexual exploitation. Ali continues: “Hasina was still working at the factory this was all Chanu knew. She hovered for the postman, hid letters, invented bland statements of well-being and minor mishaps. All she could do for her sister was deliver her from further shame and this was all she had done” (183).
Hasina too feels ashamed of her sexual exploitation. Justin Karr’s statement about victims of sexual exploitation in *Women’s Rights, Issues on Trial*, (2008) is pertinent here, “About a quarter of all victims blame themselves. Many are ashamed, and others are simply so sickened by the situation that they are unable to make any effective response” (132). According to the codes of patriarchy, when a man takes advantage of a woman sexually, the disgrace is attributed to the female. It is not the man’s conduct that is dishonourable but the woman’s actions that are disreputable and she deserves to be spurned. Hasina’s sense of shame and ensuing depression and Nazneen’s actions prove this fact. Both do not think of confronting the man but somehow consider the woman culpable. In addition to all this, Nishi, Shahnaz ’s friend tells her the tale of her sixteen-year-old sister, who had gone on a 'holiday' to Sylhet and six months later came back with a husband and pregnant with a “swelling belly” (466). Nishi plans to run away from home and return only at the age of twenty-five when she will be too old to marry according to the patriarchal system. “At that ancient age the danger of marriage was over” (466). Thus providing more support to the subjugation of women, as girls have to be married at a young age. Hossain and Hossain reveal their views about Bangladeshi society where the predominant religion is Islam: “Since sexuality, in Islam is permitted only within marriage, there is great pressure to marry daughters at an early age. Women are perceived as vulnerable and in need of male protection” (5, 2002). According to this view, girls cannot be trusted to look after themselves, they may stray from the strictly stipulated code of the honour of their religion and therefore have to be married before harm befalls them.

The burdens of motherhood and guilt of failure is felt by the women and become a form of oppression. Hasina’s letters again are a source packed with evidence of this kind of violence too. “If a woman cannot be a mother, she feels guilty, as if it is her fault, as if her body has betrayed itself and her. Women also imagine that whatever else they are or may do, their ultimate destiny is linked with motherhood” (123). V. Geetha states in *Gender* (2006). This is an allusion to the singular function of women in the patriarchal system which gets expressed here. Hasina writes in one of her early letters: “Malek have First Class job. I pray
for son” (25). Hasina would like to deliver a baby and become a mother. Significantly, she prays for a son, a male heir as she is aware even at the age of sixteen that this all important accomplishment will give her a new and improved status in the family. Monica Khanna in “Deconstructing the Ideology of Motherhood – An Investigation into the Socio-cultural Construct of Motherhood in India through an Analysis of Cultural Narratives from 1970’s to the Present” (2007) argues, “Moreover, a woman who is infertile and unable to fulfill the role of mothering prescribed for her is regarded as an incomplete woman, and is subject to tremendous social ostracism and pressurized to seek different treatments in order to produce children” (4). This is substantiated later in Ali’s narrative when Hasina goes to visit the factory where she worked: “I see Shahnaz she come out and I pull my headscarf around face. She expect a child. It make me feel my shame. God will not give child to me” (168). For a woman, not being able to bear a child is a cause for feeling humiliated.

Motherhood or rather the lack of it is an important concern not only for Hasina but other women too, Hasina writes: “One young wife cannot have child, she have cut hair short and she praying. Not even short hair can bring child for me now” (175). Motherhood as an unoptional, compulsory part of a woman’s life gets reinforced further when Mrs Islam and Razia tell Nazneen about a woman in their neighbourhood who has jumped down from the sixteenth floor of her flat: “You have to bear in mind she had no children; this is after twelve years of marriage” (27) Razia informs. As if this is not evidence enough of the status of a childless wife, Razia adds for good measure, “Yes, that is so!...It is the worst thing for any woman” (27). Inability to bear a child is always the woman’s fault and the worst ill-fortune to befall a woman in this scheme.

Hasina marries Ahmed for the protection he affords as Hussein’s liver is failing and a woman needs a man to protect her in such a social order. Soon after her wedding to Ahmed she writes: “Three weeks now without I leave the flat” (172). Again the implication is that she is imprisoned but her reaction to this is more revealing. She loves this captivity “But I have come inside now. How I love the walls. Keep me here” (173). Although happily married to Ahmed at least
temporarily, Hasina still lives in trepidation which her own words reveal: “Sometime I look out from roof and I think I see my first husband…I see man walk with hand on hip just like he use to do. And this when my fear is escaping. Other time I see man who come to me very often in Narayanganj. These time I feel the fear on my back” (175). In a pattern recurring in Hasina’s life, Ahmed soon outgrows her; he uses and abuses her and then leaves her. Here too the woman gets accused if the man is no longer interested in her: “He say things not in good order any more even I do always try to keep it good ordered like anything. He say I put curse on him and that is why we marry. He say how his family going to take daughter-in-law like me?” (176) says Hasina and she is forced to leave her marital home all over again. She writes to her sister, “I do not have address for you to reach me” (177). Once again in the story, she is without a roof over her head.

Apart from this, the evils of the dowry system that are common to the Asian subcontinent get delineated by the portrayal of of Shahnaz’s character in Hasina’s letters. Shahnaz is more educated than the rest, more aware, she has a job but is not yet married due to dowry problems, all the boys chosen by her parents ask for dowry and she refuses such suitors. The practice of dowry is another system that is derogatory for women. It puts great financial burden on the families of girls and is the cause for other offensive practices like bride burning and female foeticide. “Dowry custom was built to suppress, oppress, and prove male dominance over women. So many women have given away their lives, or killed or tortured to death for this dowry culture-especially, when we talk about Asian subcontinent”. <http://www.bdtips.com/Article_Body.php?Article_ID=2642#2nd> This discriminatory system is prevalent in Bangladeshi culture. Nurunnahar Islam Munni articulates her views about the traditions in her native country, Bangladesh: “In this country there are many kinds of unpleasant customs. Dowry is the most common unpleasant custom of those. It creates many problems. It is against the success of our country. Through this custom the bride has to give a large amount of money, furniture, ornaments and many things to the bridegroom. It is a very terrible situation for the society. Women & their family suffer a lot for this dowry system”. Munni’s remarks confirm the effects of the dowry system on the women.
of her country. Women in Bangladesh like Shahnaz who expect to be treated with respect and parity suffer the consequences of their refusal to give in to such unsociable and unequal customs.

Another case is Renu, who was married and widowed at the age of fifteen. In addition to this, her father has thrown her out. Hasina tells readers “she say there is no one to protect me. I must go here and there always alone” (151). Further Renu tells Hasina: “Anyone can say anything they like because I am woman, alone. I put here on earth to suffer. I am waiting and suffering. This is all.” (151). Renu’s refrain too is: “we waiting and suffering. That is why we here’ ” (159). Renu too has learnt to accept her fate, like Amma, Nazneen and Hasina’s mother and Hasina says: “But sometime she remind of Amma and then I must find reason to go away from her” (151). Even the colours a woman wears are decided for her by society: “Shahnaz say you know how people talk. If you wear bright colour they say you asking them to look” (152). Still more evidence of the oppressions of the patriarchal society is that Hasina’s beauty is not regarded as a boon, but rather a bane. “And how the older women began to say even before she turned eleven, that such beauty could have no earthly purpose but trouble. Amma would cry, and say it was no fault of hers. Abba looked grim and said that was certainly true, which made her cry harder. And, all in all, it was a fact that being beautiful brought hardship, though nobody would think it” (50). Nazneen tells Razia. Beauty in a girl attracts attention from males but again, they are not to blame. It is the beautiful girl who is guilty of inappropriate conduct.

More critical is the information given by the omniscient narrator of the period after Amma, Nazneen’s mother dies, “After a mourning period, Abba took another wife, she appeared suddenly out of nowhere and Abba said, 'This is your new mother! Four weeks later, just as suddenly, she went, she was never mentioned again” (46). Again this information goes to show that the new wife too, being a woman could not have escaped the mental and psychological cruelty that the other women endure and accept. That perhaps was the reason for her sudden departure. Even in London, the standards are still the traditional values of patriarchal society as Jorina's case illustrates in Nazneen's words:
Mrs Islam says Jorina has been shamed. Her husband goes with other women. She started work, and everyone said, “He cannot feed her”. Even though he was working himself, he was shamed. And because of this he became reckless and started going with other women. So Jorina has brought shame on them all. (97)

When the husband goes astray, is unfaithful to his wife; that too is the wife's fault. It is the wife’s working outside the house that has brought this upon the whole family. More evidence of psychological violence comes in the form of Jorina’s daughter who is sent back to Bangladesh, at the age of sixteen to be married, and live in the village. Razia tells her tale, “'she is sixteen, she begged them to let her stay and take her exams…the brother has gone bad, and they wanted to save the daughter. So there it is. Now she can't run off for a love marriage'” (49). In the oppressive system of patriarchy, a family’s honour lies in the females, so to atone for the trespasses of the son, the daughter has to be sacrificed and the family's honour saved. Apart from this Nazma's multiple pregnancies (122) is another instance of the standing of women in such societies.

However the modern Razia too is not liberated enough to be free from the violence. Razia's husband inflicts psychological torture on her “'He works all day and night. He keeps me locked up inside'” (123). This goes to show that Razia too is imprisoned inside her marital home by her cruel husband. Preeti Misra has explained: “Rejection can be used as punishment for not cooperating with an abusive partner” (72, 2006). Razia faces this too. Her husband does not allow her to take up a job and threatens her: “'If I get a job, he will kill me, He will kill me kindly, just one slit across here, That's the sort of man he is. For hours, for days, he says nothing at all, and when he speaks that's the kind of talk I get'” (123). Later she elaborates her need to take up a job for her children’s sake, “the children ask for things. Everything they see, they want. And I don't have money. Jorina can get me a sewing job but my husband will come to the factory and slaughter me like a lamb!” (123), still later she says: “'My husband is so miserly he will not waste even words on me. Now he has the night job, driving around with animal carcasses. If he has anything to say, he says it to them'” (124). Presently, her misfortunes proliferate, her husband does not give her enough funds for the
Razia’s husband denies his family in order to finance the building of a mosque back home, in Bangladesh. “Her husband was mean. It was getting worse. After much brooding in the kitchen, sorting through the shelves and cupboards, he denounced his wife as a wanton housekeeper. Too many jars, too many packets, too many tins. All shouting abundance, luxury, waste. There would be no more money until every last thing on the shelves was eaten” (124) declares the omniscient raconteur. Razia’s husband refuses to give her any more money until all the packets of biscuits and raisins in the house are over, with the result that the family including the children have to eat only biscuits and raisins for three days and little Shefali gets diarrhoea. Her brother Tariq tells his mother “Ma, Shefali going to the toilet nine times every day, she is ashamed to put her hand up” (125). In this way, the children too get included in the husband's violence causing more pain to the harassed mother. “There would be no more money until every last thing on the shelves was eaten” (124). This is another form of psychological violence on the female, hurting the children or denying them sustenance.

The Brick motif appears as an important pattern here. Bricks play a part in Razia’s misery. Razia’s husband says to her: “What do you want me to do? Kill my own self, working and working, for you to spend it here, penny-thing there and nothing to show at the end? I am working for bricks, when I am gone to dust; they will be standing’ ” (125). Razia’s husband seeks immortality in bricks, for when he is gone, the bricks will remain and thus they are the objective of all his hard work and denial for his family. And Razia starts calling him “the brick man” (125). Here the brick symbol can be observed very evidently as the bricks develop into a cause for violence. Ali recounts: “Ask your father, she told Shefali, ask him how many bricks he earn today. Shefali, twisting her hair, said, Abba, how many bricks you earn today? And landed on her back, and cried quietly into her mother's lap” (125). The query pertaining to bricks is so offensive for Razia’s husband that he hits out at his daughter who is only repeating her mother’s words. The brick motif develops, Razia, is affected by the bricks that her husband wants to put
together for the mosque. Referring to a study conducted by the NSPCC school of Social work, London, England, Maria Roy, says “It became evident in the course of this study that the children are often used by the parents as pawns in the matrimonial conflict and not people with their own individual needs and rights, although the parents may not be aware they are doing this. Indeed the parents own problems shouted out so loudly they were not able to hear or see their childrens’ difficulties” (256, 1977). As can be seen in the incident recounted that the little girl, Shefali who is only doing the mother’s bidding bears the brunt of the father’s anger.

Bricks turn out to be an article of abhorrence in the case of other women too. At the time of Hasina’s visit to her former place of employment. She writes to Nazneen: “I walk around factory gates around the walls. If it possible to hate bricks I hating them. This factory have ruin me. (169). She hates the factory because she was fired due to a false allegation and now the bricks of the factory become the object of her extreme dislike. In this way, bricks crucial for the construction of a building are used to reveal the unpleasant aspects of the lives of some women in the narrative. Nazneen too feels claustrophobic in her small cluttered flat in London. So, while the bricks of Tower Hamlets and Brick Lane imprison Nazneen, the bricks of the garment factory have wrecked Hasina's life and the bricks of the mosque create melancholy for Razia’a family. In this way, the author uses the theme of bricks as an essential symbol for the oppression of women characters.

Also, Razia herself does not grant equal status to both her children, saying about her daughter. “’But Shefali will make a love marriage over my dead body’ ” (51). Thus reinforcing the regulations of patriarchy, the standards are different for sons and daughters. In addition, when talking about their friend Amina’s troubles Nazneen says and Razia adds, “’Not only that…He has another wife that he forgot to mention for the past eleven years’” (71). For the man, telling the wife of his marriage with another woman is not necessary and can be conveniently ascribed to amnesia.
4.2.4 Violence due to the Double Standards of Men

The double standards of the men are in evidence in many places in the novel. Preeti Misra’s viewpoint is: “The duality of values that operates in the patriarchal family is internalised at an early age, as a natural inevitable part of life” (77). This duality can be observed chiefly in the actions of Chanu who considers himself an educated man. Although Chanu is proud of his educated status and the way he treats of his wife and family his behaviour during various events in the novel is informative. A sewing machine is bought so that Nazneen can work from home and contribute to the ‘going home fund’. However, when the sewing machine is brought home and set-up, Chanu behaves as if he is doing Nazneen a favour: “‘It is lucky for your mother’, Chanu told the girls, ‘that I am an educated man’” (192). Nazneen who was not given permission earlier to go out alone is now expected to earn money as the man, Chanu is unable to get a job. Therefore, the woman’s services are commissioned to produce some funds that will help in the husband’s plans made for the entire family without their opinions on the subject being considered.

When Chanu loses his job, he devises various strategies to hold on to power within the house by subordinating his daughters and finding ways to get annoyed with them so that he can relieve his frustrations by mistreating them and maintaining a dominant position in the house but still continue to put up a front of being cultured and educated. The Dubravka Zarkovhukov SAGAT Report states: “Gender is not the only organizing principle of social life. Class relations, race, sexuality, ethnic and religious identities are equally significant, thus we cannot simply say that men and masculinity are privileged in most of the societies we know, and that women and femininity are oppressed” (Cited in Bhasin, 2004, 24). This is borne out in Brick Lane in the treatment meted out to Chanu. In the western world to which he has migrated, men of colour like Chanu too face inequity due to their status as migrants from another part of world. The report goes on: “In every society, only certain groups of men are privileged and only certain forms of masculinity, those that belong to the dominant men, are dominant. In western societies, white heterosexual men, and their forms of
masculinity are dominant. Forms of masculinity associated with Muslim migrant or homosexual men are marginalized or explicitly banned” (Cited in Bhasin, 2004, 24). In a diasporic location where Chanu belongs to a minority, it is true he is also marginalized and faces rejection: “But he was slighted. By customers, by suppliers, by superiors and inferiors. He worked hard for respect but he could not find it. There was in the world a great shortage of respect and Chanu was among the famished” (203) writes the author. And it is, perhaps, this that is the cause of his anger and frustration which gets converted into his annoyance with Shahana.

The hegemony of the males gets highlighted further in Chanu’s response to this disagreeable situation. Readers find Chanu who considers himself a cultured man in the habit of beating up his elder daughter Shahana “From the dangerous set of her daughter's mouth, Nazneen divined a flogging ahead” (180). The omniscient author's intervention states: “Terrible in the incantation and stunningly inept in the delivery, these beatings were becoming a frequent ritual. They took their toll on each member of the family, but most of all on Chanu” (180). Another way Chanu devises to cope with his disappointments outside the house is to make unreasonable demands on his two daughters. He sets tasks for his daughters to do like asking them to put on his slippers, arrange his pillows, pass the water jug, find his pen, pull the curtains or draw them back (204). And these tasks always left him unsatisfied with their execution, for it is not the task per se that is of consequence here but the fact that his man’s ego needs satisfaction, which he gets by bullying his innocent daughters. This is not enough for him, nevertheless and finally he finds a task for his daughters which makes him feel important “Eventually he hit on something. He took up his books again and employed the girls as page-turners. It was perfect” (204). He makes his daughters hold up his books while he reads them “They had to watch his face for signs that he was nearing the end of the page and turn to the next. He was fair with them. He gave signs, little anticipatory raises of his tangled eyebrows, only an inattentive daughter could fail to see. A disrespectful daughter, who fully deserved the lashing, verbal or otherwise, that followed such dereliction of duty” (205).
Chanu’s behaviour can be understood through the following: Kamla Bhasin in *Exploring Masculinity Gender Basic* (2004) discusses men “Men's roles are designed around performance and achievement, they are defined and define themselves, in terms of their jobs, positions, activities. As a result of these expectations they suppress sensitivity, try to be tough, to not express their emotions, not talk about personal anxieties and doubts to their friends” (36). Since the central tenet of patriarchy is the dominant position of men within a society; to lead, to control and make decisions for that society. Patriarchy is maintained by men fulfilling a patriarchal, masculinist role. Therefore, it is a practice that affects men too. It contains a range of expectations for the men who have to be in control. A patriarchal system demands a certain kind of masculine behaviour from men. In other words, men are compulsorily expected to live up to and embody a narrow idea of masculinity that values athleticism, aggression, sexual prowess, and a “hard” unemotional exterior. The kind of masculinity that is desired in men leads to emotional repression. Kamla Bhasin persists: “There is a sort of "emotional castration" of boys and men, they are forced to wear masks of strength and toughness and become strangers to themselves. Because men are born with power and status, they learn to defend it. Those who have power and want to retain it cannot allow themselves to become vulnerable” (36, 2004). This is true in the case of Chanu.

Also, when Hasina writes a letter from Dhaka, informing Nazneen of her whereabouts Chanu is happy, as now he does not need to take any action, again showing his hypocrisy and double standards. Nazneen tells Razia “He cannot accept one single thing in his life but this: that my sister should be left to her fate. Everything else may be altered, but not that” (70). When Hasina elopes at the young age of sixteen, true to the patriarchal way of thinking and the double standards of men, their father, Hamid is livid with anger and waits to sever his own daughter’s head, cursing and calling her a whore, For in this arrangement, a daughter has no choice but to accept what her father and society in general dole out to her and this fact is brought out well in Hamid’s behaviour subsequent to Hasina’s elopement, when she does not return for sixteen days, he vents his anger by thrashing some of his labourers, and refuses to even think about her well-being
and her whereabouts. Hamid’s actions are distressing for Nazneen who lies awake at night in Dhaka worrying about her father and how he would injure Hasina should she decide to return but being a woman she is not equipped to do anything about it except being a passive witness. Significantly this behaviour comes from a man who stays away from his wife for days.

The double standards of the men are seen once again when Hasina is fired from her job (162). She is falsely accused of having an affair with Abdul, a male co-worker at the garment factory. The garment factory manager fires her for this unpardonable transgression but only laughs and jokes with Abdul for the same crime of having a sexual relationship outside marriage. Again the author offers more proof of hypocrisy. Only men are served and attended to in this system as seen when Nazneen cannot find her way back: “But now the waiters were at home asleep, or awake being waited on themselves by wives who only served and were not served in return except with board and lodging and the provision of children whom they also, naturally waited upon” (55). This is more proof of the double standards of patriarchal society since only men enjoy the privilege of being served in the house. “If patriarchal families consider boys to be superior, if families go to any length to have sons (pray in temples, churches and mosques, fast for boys, have female foetuses aborted; go through innumerable pregnancies till a son is born), etc. then it is obvious that sons are given special care and treatment” (15, 2004) says Kamla Bhasin. This is evident in Brick Lane. Shefali calls her brother, Tariq, “Your precious son” (356) while addressing her mother implying that Razia too treats her two children differently and that there is a gender bias in the treatment of her children although she is a modern woman. Also the very fact that Tariq takes to drugs seems to be because at first Razia asks no questions about his dealings and does not want to believe her son’s misbehaviour.

4.2.5 Sexual Violence Against Women

Mr Chowdhury forces Hasina into sex with him (166). Subhash Chandra Singh in “Gender Violence: Some Contextual Issues” (2005) discusses: “The ‘exploitation rape', which is the most pervasive theme of women's sexual abuse, is
completely excluded from the definition of rape, there is little difference between
sexual access gained through the actual or threatened use of physical violence, or
that gained through the actual or threatened use of economic, organisational or
social violence” (24, 2005). According to this view, Hasina has been raped by Mr
Chowdhury. She blames god at first, she writes to her sister: “this is what happen
and afterward I cry. All the time I thinking my life cursed. God have given one
life but he has curse it. He put rocks in my path thorns under feet snakes over
head. Which way I turn any way it is dark. He never light it. If I drink water it turn
to mud eat food it poison me. I stretch out my hand it burn and by my side it
wither. This is what he plan for me. This is how I thinking” (166). Later on she
blames herself: “Everything has happen is because of me. I take my own husband.
I leave him. I go to the factory. I let Abdul walk with me. I the one living here
without paying” (166). It does not occur to her that it is the man, Mr Chowdhury
who has deceived her and made use of her. B.J. Cling in Sexualized Violence
postulates: “Another frequent consequence of sexual abuse is depression,
particularly if the abuse was ongoing and the perpetrator was someone close to the
victim” (249). The shock of being violated is certain to cause dejection and
despair in a women. When her trust is betrayed, her emotions abused, the natural
response is a sense of despondency. Mr Chowdhury whom she looked up to as
a good man, in fact as a father betrays her trust and perpetrates this violation on her.
Being a woman, Hasina is miserable and holds herself responsible for
Mr. Chowdhury’s misdeeds. Later she tells her sister the frequency of Mr.
Chowdhury’s visits: “He comes every week. Sometimes he comes twice” (167).

Other evidence of behavior that is sexually unwarranted comes when Mr.
Chowdhury says “You are my daughter, I like to bring you to my house. But what
people will say? We are not related. I have no wife...'If a girl comes to a man's
house as servant there is no trouble. She must come as servant. Or as wife, then all
is well’ ” (163). Then there is Shenaz’s story of a jatra girl who is compelled to sell
her body as she has a husband who has left her and a father who has disowned her.
(65). The above incidents are part of Hasina’s letters. However physical sexual
violence is not restricted to these, Nazneen’s thoughts too serve this purpose. One
day Nazneen thinks about her childhood and another scandal comes to her mind. A girl is subjected to rape. Mustafa, the cowmankidnaps a girl from a neighbouring village and, takes her into the jungle for three days and nights (102). 

“In most sexual relations men are subjects, their desires, likes and dislikes and their satisfaction are paramount. Women at best are junior and passive partners, at worst commodities, intended to satisfy men’s desires or lust” (29, 2004) states Kamla Bhasin. This finds confirmation in the story of Mumtaz’s jinni which serves to tell readers about more episodes of sexual and psychological violence: “The woman had three sons and five daughters and could scarcely feed so many mouths yet her husband still wanted to sleep with her and make more mouths, more empty bellies, what should she do? How could she deny her husband? And how could she magic more food from her cooking pot?” (396). The jinni’s answer is revealing of the status of women. He advises the woman to tell her husband: “First you must choose which one will die. Kill the child and I will give you another. We cannot keep any more children alive, so you must choose the ones to die. For every child you kill, I will replace him” (397). For in these kind of systems only drastic responses such as these serve to convince the males who do not think of the plight of the children and wife, they are concerned only about their own needs.

### 4.2.6 Economic Exploitation of Women

Zainab's story is the best example of the economic exploitation of women in the novel. Her husband is involved in an accident, a notice is served on him and, Zainab has to spend her entire savings to release him from police custody. Still, this is not enough, the other party wants more money, Zainab cannot provide this. Her children and family bear the troubles “The son have been taken out of school” (167) and later (168) the family just disappears. In addition to this, after losing her job Hasina tries unsuccessfully to get another job as she is afraid for herself. Mr Chowdhury is losing interest in her: “He come only once a week and sometime not at all. If he stop visit how long before he puts me out” (167). So she tries making bamboo whistles and scrap dolls and selling them but here too the police kick her out and threaten her as she cannot afford the 'rent' for the
pavement. Slowly she is pushed into the life of a whore. For small presents like saris, ribbons and boxes in which to keep her personal belongings, she is coerced into having sexual relations with Hussein and Ali. Hasina has no choice, in order to survive, she has to accept this. Later the landlord, Mr. Chowdhury stops coming altogether; “Landlord no longer come, I pay rent now” (169). And Hasina is forced to take on more customers in order to continue to exist. Hussein becomes her pimp: “Hussein still looking out for me. He the one making sure I get the money. If he not look out anyone take what they like and not pay” (169). More support about the exploitation of females comes when Hasina continues: “He tell me work hard only few year left to work. Best price for girls eleven twelve. Someone not want to pay Hussein deal with them” (169). Hussein has other young girls attached to him who also work as prostitutes for a meager amount further revealing the sexual and economic exploitation of females.

Economic exploitation of women is not restricted to their being deprived of their money unfairly. It also extends to their remuneration in a workplace. Lena Dominelli discusses this situation, she says: “Like housework, women’s waged work is devalued and poorly paid” (162, 2006). In many areas of production, the women workforce is needed for their services. However, here too their work is not given its appropriate place, the work that women do is considered to be unimportant and cheap. This justifies their poor compensation. Dominelli continues: “Women tend to be in subordinate positions while men hold positions commanding authority, power and resources” (163, 2006). The subordination of women extends to the workplace also, they hold inferior posts while the jobs that carry authority and prestige are reserved for the men. The nature of the work that women do is also a form of exploitation, as the women do the menial work. Dominelli adds: “Housework has a large element of drudgery, and women’s waged work can be tedious, repetitive and monotonous” (167, 2006). Dominelli’s postulations are evidenced in the novel too.

Monica Ali also depicts the life of the garment factory workers especially the women. Again, Hasina’s letters are the source of information. Ali writes about a letter that Nazneen recieves after a long time: “The letter was longer this time. It
gave an address Hasina talked about her landlord, Mr Chowdhury, about the job he was going to get for her in a garment factory” (69). This is the first mention of the garment factories that have been set up in Bangladesh. The official position of The Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) as put up on their website is “Although Bangladesh is not developed in industry, it has been enriched in Garment industries in the recent past years. In the field of Industrialization garment industry is a promising step. It has given the opportunity of employment to millions of unemployed, specially innumerable uneducated women of the country” <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/About GarmentsIndustry>.

In a poor underdeveloped country like Bangladesh, these factories afforded jobs to many unemployed persons. However, as S. Amin points out the effects of this development were not wholly beneficial. He articulates in “Social Organization and Women Empowerment” (2002): “The impact of the 2000-odd garment industries employing more than a million poor rural women in urban areas of Dhaka and Chittagong on the overall socio-economic conditions of the women workers is very complex as well” (109). The factories did make a significant contribution in the field of the country’s export income. With their exports the Muslim and Jamdani cloth of Bangladesh achieved worldwide fame and the cloth was used as the luxurious garments of the royal figures in Europe and other countries. This naturally brought heavy revenue and opened up employment opportunities for the poor, unemployed people of the country. Amin continues: “On the one hand, these industries have been providing employment to thousands of poor women, who previously had no succour other than working as domestic maids at bare subsistence, begging or resorting to prostitution in extreme cases or remaining as unwanted dependents on near or distant relatives; and on the other, they have been exploiting the cheap labour of these helpless women who have no right to organise unions to demand better wages and working conditions.” (109, 110, 2002). The garment factories, although they provide jobs to the poor women play their part in their mistreatment as well.
Hasina’s next letter gives readers more information: “I tell you about garment factory. Only half hour walk from here and it fine place. Eight o’ clock is start time. All must come few minutes before and eight o’ dock exact they unlock gate. If you come late it is trouble because they lock the gates after to keep safe” (149). The closing of the gates strictly at the prescribed time, ostensibly to protect the women seems to be more to prevent them from coming in even a few minutes late. S Amin reports further: “According to an ILO report, these working women are a form of underpaid drudgery, often carried out under deplorable working conditions” (110, 2002). The content of the report reveals that the women do not enjoy comfortable conditions, in fact the conditions are dreadful. S Amin continues, “some recent studies have shown the state of misery, powerlessness and, uncertainty undergone by the average female garment factory worker in Bangladesh. They are not only grossly underpaid...but also have to suffer terrible working conditions and environment, they are often victims of physical abuse-beating rape and molestation-not only by male employers and supervisors but also by members of the police force. Most of the female workers are, again, mal-nourished and overworked” (110, 2002). All this is reflected in Hasina’s letters. She writes about her co-workers: “We all talk together in lunch break. Four in my row stick like sister. Aleya Shahnaz Renu and me. I tell you about them my other sisters” (150). She tells her sister about the problems faced by her friends. About Aleya she says: “Husband make problem for her but Aleya thinking of children only and not the husband” (150). The oldest, Renu, a widow was married at the age of fifteen to an old man who died within three months. She goes back to her father but is thrown out soon. (151). Renu’s example reinforces S. Amin’s further observations: “Their social inferiority is exploited by the rich and powerful and consequently many poor women are forced into employment by poverty and these jobs do not fulfil any emancipating role at all” (110, 2002). As seen from the details given by Hasina in her letters, all the women garment factory workers face problems.

The poor conditions in the factories can be surmised from information Hasina’s further letters reveal. S. Amin goes on: “One recent study has portrayed production relations in these factories as ‘wage slavery’ for women workers”
(111, 2002). The earnings of the women are barely enough for survival and in addition to this, they are taken advantage of in other ways too by the male co-workers and the Management. S. Amin carries on: “The study has shown how male workers have retained their dominance within a factory's 'sexual hierarchy' by insisting that their work be defined as 'skilled' (better paid) and women's work as semi or unskilled” (111, 2002). This too is supported by Hasina, she says about the factory she works in: “It have three room around courtyard all new solid concrete. One place is for machine. I go there. Another for cutting and finishing. Men go there” (150). This shows the segregation of jobs according to gender that provides grounds for additional exploitation of the workers. In spite of this, it is a fact that being able to work outside the house, even on a meager income is a step forward for the women as S. Amin’s final declaration testifies: “However, despite all these constraints which undermine human dignity and rights, garment industries have opened up a new world for female workers. Some critics of the exploitative garment industry have acknowledged the positive aspects of women working on their own, and agree that women participation in wage-employment empowers and liberates women” (111, 2002). As Hasina’s case testifies, a job, however exploitative is better than no job for when she loses her job, Hasina is forced into prostitution. This is the only means available to her for survival, the solitary path that separates continued existence and death.

Besides this, when Nazneen starts taking on sewing jobs, although it is the woman who is working, the man controls the money coming in. Chanu says one day: “We’re making good money this week…'Don't worry. I'll take care of everything' ” (208). Later the omniscient narrator informs readers: “For two whole months she did not even know how much she had earned” (208). Still later, Chanu wants Nazneen to ask for more money for her sewing jobs. He recommends: “Explain that it will be for a short time. Tell him that it is lucky for you that your husband is an educated man” (371). Chapter Nine draws an important parallel between the lives of Nazneen and Hasina. While Hasina's life as a prostitute was managed by Hussain, Nazneen's work as a seamstress is controlled by Chanu. Both women work to be empowered and independent, but instead become
enslaved and dependent by the men in their lives as can be seen above. The next section examines the situation of women in another society, Afghanistan as depicted in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

### 4.3. Domestic Violence in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

This section takes up a study of the depiction of domestic violence in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). Apart from the violence and ravages of war, a great deal of this variety of violence is also portrayed in this novel through the story of the women in Afghanistan. This novel acquaints readers with the situation of women in Afghanistan, their inferior status, the unspeakable atrocities they are made to undergo and the collusion of the forces of patriarchy and official agencies that make feasible the discrimination and exploitation of half the human population on the basis of gender. This amounts to a serious issue which effectively means that this sector is unable to realize its potential and is condemned to a second-rate existence. The novel comprises 51 chapters with an afterword in which Hosseini mentions his work for UNCHR, the UN refugee agency.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which was written after the much acclaimed, *The Kite Runner* is Khaled Hosseini’s second novel. Published in the year 2007, the novel was written after Hosseini travelled back to his native country, Afghanistan, to scrutinize for himself the nation’s situation in the aftermath of decades of turmoil. In early 2007, Hosseini told *Time* Magazine about the motivation for doing this, “On the one hand, I was hoping I’d got it right, that I didn't screw up [in The Kite Runner]. On the other hand, what I'd written was so terrible, part of me was kind of hoping that it wasn't quite that bad. The reality was that it was actually worse.” The novel is set in Afghanistan, spanning from the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, the Afghan Civil War, the advent of the Mujahideen, the rise of the Taliban, to the period of and subsequent to 9/11, etc. Thus, although the temporal setting of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is modern, the events, particularly the condition of the women depicted in it are so dreadful that it could well have been set in a primitive period. As if to reinforce the time frame
of the novel there are references to the American romantic epic film, Titanic, released in 1997. The film became a huge blockbuster and was popular in Afghanistan too (269, 270). In addition, there are allusions to Titanic City (290), a bazaar on the banks of the River Kabul called by this name by the locals in homage to the movie that invaded the world's collective consciousness. The infiltration of the Titanic phenomenon into the novel serves as a reminder to the reader that the events of the novel are not taking place in an archaic setting, but rather in a time close to the present. The bombing of the Twin Towers in America is mentioned as well (340) and this is watched on television by some characters. All this situates the novel in the present.

In spite of being a male writer, Khaled Hosseini has depicted the condition of women in Afghanistan so convincingly that the novel becomes a compelling narrative of lives of the women in the text. Nancy Pearl (2009) shares her response, “when a male author can get inside a woman's head and write so persuasively, so authentically, that I find myself frequently turning to the back cover to see if it is, indeed, a man who wrote the book.” The dedication of the novel by Khaled Hosseini reads: “This book is dedicated to Haris and Farah, Both the noor of my eyes, and to the Women of Afghanistan.” The commitment among others to ‘the women of Afghanistan’, is significant as this lets the readers know at the very outset that women’s issues will be paramount in this narrative. The dedication becomes a symbolic avowal of the plight of the country, and the women in it. Both are damaged by violence but survive nevertheless. Khaled Hosseini in “5 questions for Khaled Hosseini” has said: “I went to Afghanistan in 2003 and met lots of women and heard so many sad, inspiring and horrific stories. All their stories came back to me when I began writing the book in early 2004” (2009). This is reflected in the lives of the women characters in the novel. The importance of endurance for Mariam and Nana and by extension other women of Afghanistan is indicative of their position in the war torn society of Afghanistan. As Nana had said to Mariam often, “there won’t be any shortage of things” to endure (18). Ultimately, throughout the rest of the novel, Mariam's capacity for endurance is what allows her to survive horrible conditions and depressing personal losses. Men too undergo the violence of the fighting, but for the women
there is additional violence because the men in their lives inflict cruelty on them, examples being Nana’s father and husband Jalil and Mariam’s father and husband Rasheed.

After Nana’s death, Jalil takes Mariam in, but she no longer adores him. He and his family decide to get the fifteen-year-old Mariam married to Rasheed, a shoemaker, “a tall man thick-bellied and broad-shouldered” (48), with a “harsh raspy voice” (48) who is around forty or forty-five years old. His first wife died during childbirth ten years ago and son drowned three years ago. Mariam is averse to this union as she does not love Rasheed but is forced into marriage with this man, much older than her. Jalil’s wife, Afsoon locks the door of Mariam’s room so that she could not run away from the entrapping marriage. Hosseini’s depiction of this minute fact serves to show that in Afghan culture marriage is not equated with true love, but rather with convenience, as also the obligations and conventions in patriarchy. The temporary imprisonment of Mariam before her wedding ceremony also becomes the starting point for her lifelong marital sentence. Marriage with the vicious tempered Rasheed becomes a penalty for her; Rasheed behaves as her tormentor rather than husband. Over time, he becomes verbally and physically abusive to his wives and daughter; to the point of near murder, he also compels Mariam to participate in sex that he forces upon her. The matrimonial home becomes, in that case, equivalent to a detention centre from which there is no freedom for women like Mariam. The recurring brutal battering, beating, kicking, slapping and verbal insults she encounters in her conjugal dwelling become for her even worse than custodial violence.

4.3.1 Pre-Taliban Period

The previous section introduced the unhappy lives that women in Afghanistan lead. However this period before the Taliban came to power was better for women in comparison to later times when the Taliban came to power. This section looks at the lives of women in pre-Taliban times. This era encompasses Afghanistan under the Soviet rule and under the Mujahedeen. This phase in Afghanistan was different for women who enjoyed the freedoms associated with a modern system of administration. According to Mavis Leno’s
testimony to the U.S. Senate, “before the Taliban gained dominance in Afghanistan, women were a crucial part of the workforce. In Kabul, for example: 70 percent of the teachers were women; 40 percent of doctors were women; over half the university students were women; schools at all levels were co-educational; Afghan women held jobs as lawyers, judges, engineers and nurses; and afghan women were not required to cover themselves with the burqa” (Cited in Skaine, 2002, 21). This is exemplified in the novel in the account of various characters, notably Laila’s early years. Laila is the daughter of Hakim (Babi) and Fariba (Mammy). Her father is a forward-looking man who does not expect either his wife or daughter to wear the burqa and also sends his daughter to school. Unlike Mariam, she has a privileged upbringing. She has been raised to appreciate education and to live up to her full potential. Her father tells her she will change Afghanistan, and her friends tell her she will be on the front page of the newspaper. Hakim, is an intellectual who loves books and study. He fosters Laila’s potential and challenges her to think in new ways and work hard. Although Laila’s father works in a bakery, he is a university educated man who was a school teacher before the communists fired him, prior to the coup of 1978. For him the most important thing in life was first Laila’s safety and next her education. Laila’s father impresses upon her the value of education, he states his viewpoint: “I know you’re still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now… Marriage can wait, education cannot. You’re a very, very bright girl. Truly, you are. You can be anything you want, Laila. I know this about you. And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, maybe even more. Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila. No chance” (103). These words by Laila’s father are significant as they show up the importance of women in Afghanistani society at this point in time and serve to establish a disparity with their subsequent discredited status

Laila is determined to pursue her education at all costs and, has received the awal numra certificate given yearly to the top-ranked student in each grade for the last two years in succession. Shanzai, Laila’s school teacher is a staunch supporter of the Soviets. She holds progressive views, does not cover herself in a
burqa and believes that men and women are equal in every way, “and that there was no reason women should cover if men did not” (101). Also readers are told about other girls, like Laila's two friends Giti and Hasina, who walk around uncovered and alone and even joke and laugh without restraint about unwanted suitors.

Besides, in the city of Kabul, Mariam encounters the ‘modern’ women of Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini describes them, “These women were all swinging handbags and rustling skirts, 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” (68). For the kolba bred Mariam this is a new and completely unknown world, something that she dare not even think about aspiring to. She herself is never introduced by Rasheed to friends and acquaintances: Mariam always stands a few feet away whenever Rasheed meets his friends. The contrast between her own self and the modern women of Kabul is stark. Some women may enjoy the privileges of a modern lifestyle. But for Mariam who has never stepped outside her kolba until that fateful day when she decided to meet her father's family, this world is out of bounds. V. Geetha reports in Gender (2006), “Norms and expectations exist in almost all societies, to a greater or lesser degree. They are, however, not unchanging nor are they consistent or uniform. Certain norms may be found in one historical period and discredited in the next. During the same period, they may apply to certain sorts of women and not to certain others. Expectations are defined in different ways in different societies. Within the same society there may exist different sorts of expectations” (5). Hence, while the ‘modern’ women of Afghanistan enjoy freedoms, such opportunities are not accessible to Mariam, a fact that she accepts.

Mariam is perplexed by such modernity, it creates in her an awareness of the difference between herself and these women. Khaled Hosseini elucidates, “They made her aware of her own lowliness, her plain looks, her lack of aspirations, her ignorance of so many things” (68). It does not occur to her that
she too can question the norms laid down for her by her immediate family and society around her; that she is not really that dissimilar from them. V. Geetha continues, “very few girls dare to ask why their ultimate destiny is linked to the institutions of marriage and motherhood; or why their inner lives should, heed the virtues of patience and sacrifice” (4, 2006). Patriarchy and her upbringing as a poor, illegitimate child has ingrained in Mariam ideas of her own lowliness, her inferior status and made her will feeble. She is doomed to this life, an existence of dependence, of others telling her what to do and of her merely following the laid down rules and accepting the decisions others make for her. Women like her are passive recipients of messages from the outside. Mariam's amazement with the modern women of Kabul adds insight to her ignorance of things outside of the kolba. Additionally, providing a view of these modern women gives readers a deeper understanding of the social situation in Kabul at the time. Many readers may assume that the public abuse and covering of women in Afghanistan has been a usual cultural norm for the nation’s entire existence. However, by alluding to and presenting the modern women, Hosseini subtly informs readers that this is not the case.

Additionally, in the novel, the limited liberties enjoyed by some women only serve to confirm the situation for women under patriarchy and the action of the novel shifts to the lesser status of women in society. Hosseini soon makes it obvious that not all men are enlightened through the depiction of Hasina’s father, an ill-tempered taxi driver who has already decided to give Hasina away in marriage to a first cousin who is twenty years older than her and owns an auto shop in Lahore. Hasina has met this man twice and “both times he ate with his mouth open” (104), Hasina tells Laila. Additionally, Khadim, the neighbourhood bully, calls Laila’s father, a sensitive, educated, progressive man a “sissy” (106). Hasina’s inability to rectify her situation and her father’s autocratic behaviour serve to draw attention to the condition of ordinary women in Afghanistan whom she represents. The contrast between Laila and Hasina’s accounts establish that Laila is fortunate in many ways and privileged to have a father like Babi. She is aware of this and justifiably proud and happy of this fact.
Yet again readers are rapidly reminded that in Afghanistan being a woman cannot be a matter of credit. This gets reinforced when Khaled Hosseini divulges soon enough that Laila’s mother spends all her time grieving for her two male children, her sons, Ahmad and Noor, who have been taken away to war. Mammy does not go to fetch Laila from school which exposes her to the machinations of Khadim, who sprays her hair with urine. Laila is distraught, Khaled Hosseini writes: “Sometimes Laila wondered why Mammy had even bothered having her. People, she believed now, shouldn’t be allowed to have new children if they’d already given away all their love to their old ones. It wasn’t fair” (106). Mammy attitude is negligent of Laila since she can think only of her sons.

The absence of Ahmad and Noor from the house, but consistent discussion of them in the novel serves to introduce the reader to the strong connection Afghan families have for their sons, the male heirs who are prized offspring while the female children are considered a burden. Ahmad and Noor are loyal to their cause, and ultimately die for it. When the sad news reaches Mammy, she mourns their death through remaining bed-ridden most of the time, wearing black and also suffering various ailments. Laila tends to her mother and wishes, “Mammy would notice that she Laila, hadn’t become shaheed that she was alive, here…that she had hopes of a future” (128). Being a girl, she also knows that her mother will not value her as much as her male children, her sons. “But Laila knew that her future was no match for her brothers’ past. They had overshadowed her in life. They would obliterate her in death” (128). Ahmad and Noor’s deaths symbolize the invasion of Afghan politics into the personal lives of citizens and the characters in the novel go through a similar experience.

The period of the rise of the Mujahideen underscores changing conditions especially for the women of Afghanistan. Brian Forst in Terrorism, Crime, and Public Policy, (2009) asserts: “The mujahideen of Afghanistan developed a distinctive aura of heroism for standing up bravely against a vastly larger and more technologically sophisticated soviet military power in the 1980s” (112). While the Mujahideen are looked up to as heroic, the rule of the Mujahideen is not good for the women. During their control, the soviet decrees about equality no
longer hold true and this has harsh consequences for the female population. Murders and rapes of women take place under this regime of violence. Laila is not able to go out alone and is always accompanied by Tariq.

It is also during this regime that Rasheed decides to marry Laila. The particulars of the matter are self-explanatory. Rasheed wants to marry Laila even though he is around sixty now and Laila hardly fourteen; it has been eighteen years since Rasheed married Mariam, and now he desires the beautiful and educated Laila as his bride. Mariam, of course is unhappy but being a woman, she knows only too well that she cannot convince Rasheed not to go through with the betrothal. Paradoxically, it is Mariam who is forced to convey Rasheed’s decision to the young girl. Fourteen year old Laila is Rasheed's third wife, she is still expected to be a virgin, to have an intact hymen. The young Laila being familiar with this knowledge is one more comment on the standing of women in a patriarchial set up. The life and death emphasis on virginity is applicable only to women but employment of the rule is so rigorous that the consequences for a woman who is not a virgin at the time of her marriage are unforgiving. This necessitates Laila’s hiding of a knife beneath the mattress with which she cuts her finger causing it to leave blood on the matrimonial sheets in order that Rasheed will think that she is a virgin, her hymen has just ruptured-and that the child she is bearing is his own. This act also symbolizes the false nature of the marriage between Rasheed and Laila. It foreshadows the lies that she will continue to tell him. This draws a stark contrast between the true love shared by Laila and Tariq, and the social construction of marriage that Laila enters into out of desperation for her unborn child, which further exemplifies that their marriage has no element of respect or partnership.

4.3.2 Physical Violence: A Means to Ensure Compliance from Women

Although Mariam’s marriage to Rasheed is a saga of constant violence of all kinds—physical, sexual and emotional or psychological—two incidents of physical violence stand out noticeably in this context. The first occurs when Laila and Mariam decide to run away to Peshawar in Pakistan to escape the violence of their common husband, Rasheed. The attempt to flee ends in failure as the two
women cannot travel alone and the man that they trust betrays them and absconds with their money. They are arrested and sent back to their husband. Feminist legal scholar Donna Coker explains the link between physical acts of violence and the framework of political, social, institutional and interpersonal controls that usurp a woman's capacity for self-destiny i.e. to determine the course of her life. She explicates: “Battering may be experienced as a personal violation, but it is an act facilitated and made possible by societal gender inequalities The batterer does not, indeed could not, act alone” (Cited in Schneider, 2000, 12). This reality is evident in the lives of Mariam and Laila, they try to take their fate in their own hands but the men in their country are in collusion and will not allow this. Therefore the Mujahideen members seize them and send them back to the same man that they were trying to run away from. Khaled Hosseini describes in detail the physical violence that follows when Laila and Mariam reach home in a police car guarded by a Mujahideen soldier. Laila tries to protect Mariam from Rasheed and Rasheed kicks and punches Laila and her little daughter, Aziza without any thought to her protests. Khaled Hosseini describes the scene as Laila sees it:

Then she was being dragged by the hair, she saw Aziza lifted, saw her sandals slip off, her tiny feet kicking. Hair was ripped off from Laila's scalp, and her eyes watered with pain. She saw his foot kick open the door to Mariam's room, saw Aziza flung onto the bed. He let go of Laila's hair, and she felt the toe of his shoe connect with her left buttock. She howled with pain as he slammed the door shut. A key rattled in the lock Aziza was still screaming. (240)

The unfortunate child is also not spared Rasheed's heedless torture. Both mother and child bear the brunt of his anger for the criminal act of trying to escape from him.

Mariam’s beating begins downstairs and this is observed by readers through Laila’s vision: “To Laila, the sounds she heard were those of a methodical, familiar proceeding, there was no cursing, no screaming, no pleading, no surprised yelps, only the systematic business of beating and being beaten, the thump, thump, of something solid repeatedly striking flesh” (240). This indicates that beatings and their sounds are a common happening in this house and having
suffered at the hands of Rasheed very often Mariam is hardened to these in such a way that she does not beg for mercy or even scream in pain. However, this is not enough to satisfy Rasheed’s fury. Later: “she saw Rasheed 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. Her shirt had been ripped down the front” (240). The articulation of these details by Hosseini helps the reader to realize the degree of the violence that the two women, particularly Mariam, is subjected to. As if this is not enough, Rasheed imprisons both separately for three days without food and without water. Also, he has no mercy for the little girl, Aziza, his daughter. Aziza and her mother are left in the heat of Afghanistan without a drop of water. All Laila’s pleas of mercy, for at least one glass of water for the dying baby are ignored by Rasheed. Finally, on the third day, they are released from the trauma after warnings and threats against repeating the crime of running away, and not before a final act of violence. Khaled Hosseini, recounts: “But not before delivering a kick to the flank that would have Laila passing blood for days” (243). In this way one can see that all the three females suffer brutal consequences at the hands of a man, Rasheed.

Domestic violence against women is linked to notions of dominance and supremacy. Preeti Misra makes an observation about domestic violence: “Domestic violence is all about power relations and the abuse of power in a household. It is perpetrated by one member or members collectively on another to gain control” (486, 2006). In the action of the novel, the truth of this assertion can be seen. Rasheed’s two wives have tried to challenge his power as a husband by taking independent action to free themselves of his bondage, they have to be shown that this will not be tolerated and prevented from repeating this in future. To this end Rasheed believes that he is entitled to thrash them and also cause injury to his own daughter for belonging to the feminine gender. Little Aziza is learning early the consequences of being female in Afghanistan. This sequence confirms one practice of patriarchy, that is, however unloving he may be to his wife; a husband will guard his proprietary over her in case of any attempt by her to escape. The wife is dependent on the husband who controls the purse strings and in a country like Afghanistan, the wife is reliant on men in other ways too.
Subsequent to their failed attempt to escape, Rasheed's contempt for his two wives is made apparent from the fact that he now treats both with the same distrust, disdain, and disregard. Now, he does not even consider it worthwhile to speak to them directly.

The second incident transpires soon after Tariq, Laila’s previous lover returns. His homecoming and urgent meeting with Laila suggests that their true love has not faded despite the fact that years have passed while they were apart. Additionally, the two love each other regardless of their ragged appearances. Tariq is loyal and understanding of Laila’s marital and childbearing situation. The amount of tolerance and patience they have for each other displays how much unconditional love they both share. This again stands out in comparison with the dreadful life, devoid of love and affection with Rasheed. He is livid with anger on hearing the news from his son, Zalmai. Laila, his wife, talking to a man, showing him her naked face is unthinkable for him. He becomes violent and unleashes his blows and kicks on both, Laila and Mariam.

Here, the violence against women is an expression of cultural norms of honour and shame and notions of the respectable conduct of women. As the wife of an Afghanistani man, Laila has no right to meet her male friend or show her unveiled face to him, Rasheed uses his control as the husband to teach the women a lesson for their transgressions. Donna Coker elaborates: “Batterers often use the political and economic vulnerability of women to reinforce their power and dominance over particular women. Thus their dominance or their attempts at dominance are frequently bolstered by stigmatization of victims through the use of gender social norms that define the "good" woman (wife/mother)” (Cited in Schneider, 2000, 12). Although it is Laila who has spent time with Tariq, Rasheed’s final attempt to subordinate his wives includes Mariam too. His rage is certainly not born out of lost love, but rather that the feeling that he has been shamed by Laila’s action of meeting her former lover and speaking to him without wearing her burqa. Another man has encroached on his property, his wife and Rasheed’s honour has been violated. The erring women have to be disciplined to regain lost respect. For her husband, the wife becomes only a thing for his use, he
is her owner who has the sole right to use or abuse her. Her own being is denied. Laila’s action shows signs of her desire for her former lover and Mariam has not tried to prevent this shameful happening, so she too is culpable and deserves to be punished.

Both women try unsuccessfully to protect themselves. They hit out at Rasheed but his physical strength is too strong for them. During all this, “Mariam remembered the first time she had seen his eyes under the wedding veil, in the mirror...how their gazes had, slid across the glass and, met, his indifferent, her docile, conceding, almost apologetic” (309). The difference between men and women and the ‘inferior’ status of women is reflected well in the description of gazes—the man is indifferent at his wedding to a young girl but the girl is apologetic, sorry for the fact that this man has agreed to marry a ‘harami’ like her, a girl whom no one wants. It is as if he is doing her a favour by marrying her. Khaled Hosseini writes further: “Apologetic...Mariam saw now in those same eyes what a ‘fool' she had been” (309). After having lived with Rasheed for so long, Mariam realizes that it is she who has been the aggrieved party in this marriage, that Rasheed has not done her any favour. Here, Mariam becomes the representative of the women of Afghanistan. By articulating her intimate feelings in this novel Khaled Hosseini, further reveals his perceptiveness and sympathy of a woman’s mind. He reveals Mariam’s thoughts “Had she been a deceitful wife? she asked herself. A complacent wife? Discreditable? Vulgar? What harmful thing had she willfully done to this man to warrant his malice, his continual assaults, the relish with which he tormented her? Had she not looked after him when he was ill? Fed him, and his friends, cleaned up after him dutifully?” (309). Further thoughts: “Had she not given this man her youth?...Had she ever justly deserved his meanness?” (309). But these remain unarticulated thoughts.

Rasheed’s violence is compulsive. Hans Toch in Violent Men (1969) explains that a man’s violence does not depend on any wrongdoing on the victim’s part, “physical force is a characteristic personal reaction, and that it is invoked by some people with the same consistency that persuasion, or retreat, or self-insulation, or humour, or defiance is employed by others” (10). He feels that
violence is linked to human personality. He also views, “the existence of violence as a clue, a symptom, a calling card, which, if properly read, could expose the central motives and concerns of violent men” (10). Toch’s assertion is true of men like Rasheed in Hosseini’s tale. For Rasheed, violence is a part of his personality, a way to exercise control, the desire to torment is always close as it is only this that brings about the desired result of satisfying him. Consequently, more violence ensues, and Laila breaks a drinking glass on Rasheed's face. Rasheed thinks that beating women is his birthright, retaliation by the woman is a gross offence and they have no right to defend themselves in any situation. Therefore, Laila's impudence in trying to hurt him upsets him so much that Mariam sees “his hands already wrapped around Laila's neck” (310). Of course, Mariam tries to save Laila: “She struggled to uncurl his fingers from Laila's neck, she bit them. But they remained tightly clamped around Laila's windpipe” (310). Mariam saw that Rasheed is so angry at Laila's boldness in hitting him that he will surely kill her but Mariam has other plans.

Rasheed beats Laila and tries to suffocate her. He comes close to succeeding. It is at this point of helplessness that Mariam finally decides to take matters in her own hand. The risk posed to Laila's life gives her courage and strength. Her motherly feelings come to the forefront, when she sees that Laila was no longer struggling and was turning blue: “He's going to kill her, she thought. He really means to. And Mariam could not, would not, allow this to happen. He'd taken so much from her in twenty-seven years of marriage. She would not watch him take Laila too” (310). She brings out one untested weapon – violence against violence – she uses this, as it is the only one she has. Violence is the instrument that has always been used to control Mariam and she decides to employ the same technique, as she knows that no other will work in this extreme situation. Ann Jones explains the state of a person in this situation, “People who go through it (violence), as victims or as witnesses, learn (among other things) to fear violence, to avoid violence at all costs, or to be violent” (1, 2000) and Mariam who has always preferred the first alternative is compelled to do the latter this time.
Mariam goes down to the tool shed and takes hold of a shovel. She intends to use this on Rasheed but she does not want to be a coward, she does not want to hit Rasheed without his knowledge. She calls out Rasheed’s name as “she wanted him to see” (310) and when he looks up she hits him across the temple. This action hurts Rasheed and Mariam then realizes that she has no choice but to kill him, she does not want to actually take his life but she sees that he is unrepentant. She sees only spite and sneering on his face and knows instantly that she has to finish what she started and that is she has to destroy Rasheed’s life if Laila is to stay alive. She is afraid that he will get his gun and destroy both of them. It is not for herself that she is afraid; she does not mind dying but Laila, who is now her daughter and who has just discovered that the love of her life, Tariq, is alive and well, deserves to live and be happy. To prevent complete destruction of her family Mariam musters up all the strength she has and throws one final blow upon Rasheed with the shovel. Mariam is aware of the consequences of her action for herself. She dies in order to save Laila and her family, and she chooses this death rather than die at the hands of Rasheed. This development in the narrative gives an indication of the exceptional bond that has been formed between the two women. Thus in this scheme, Mariam, a woman; when she exercises choice, has the choice of two kinds of death and like a mother, she chooses the death that will help her children to live. Here although ostensibly Mariam is the agent, she certainly credits herself with being the agent in this situation. Khaled Hosseini presents Mariam’s thoughts to the readers, “it occurred to her that this was the first time that she was deciding the course of her own life” (311). In actual fact Mariam is also the victim who is forced into a choiceless selection. Nancy Kaser-Boyd when speaking about the effects of battering and the battered woman syndrome explicates: “When a woman kills her batterer, there are two crucial aspects of battered woman syndrome: fear and the perception that escape is not possible” (Cited in Cling, 2004, 57). Mariam is certainly afraid, she also knows that for killing Rasheed she will be put to death by the Taliban, however she has no choice but to select this option, for she is going to die anyway. The only option that she is allowed is to choose the kind of death she will die. So, she is not wholly the agent in this situation too but rather a victim who gives the impression of being the agent. Later when Laila insists on her going away with them, Mariam asks her
“What will happen to your children if you're caught?” (319). Again she tells the weeping Laila “who will take care of them then? The Taliban? Think like a mother, Laila jo. Think like a mother. I am” (319). So, Mariam surrenders her life to ensure a future for her children. When she is found guilty and sentenced to death by the Taliban judges, she has no regrets for her action. Nearing death too, she thinks only of her children. Mariam makes the crucial sacrifice for Laila and the children, she is willing to take the blame, and eventually suffer the ultimate punishment for Rasheed’s death. The struggle between Laila and Rasheed ends in poetic justice with his murder by Mariam. Mariam was the first woman that the reader witnesses Rasheed torture, and she endured the longest span of abuse by Rasheed, it is therefore fitting that she puts an end to this abuse by putting an end to his life.

4.3.3 The Trauma of Psychological Violence

The auspicious time of the religious activity of Ramadan that Mariam experiences as a communal practice for the first time in her fifteen year old life is not entirely untempered with trouble either. It brings with it another form of violence against the female gender, the violence is psychological this time. Rasheed decides to observe the fast of Ramadan on a few days, and these days become difficult for Mariam. Rasheed comes home in a bad mood on such days due to hunger and Mariam is expected to pay special attention, to serve him his dinner on time. Even a delay of a few minutes one day, makes Rasheed so angry that he refuses to eat the food that she places before him. Instead he eats only radish and bread. Khaled Hosseini elaborates “He said nothing, and went on chewing the bread, his temples working, the vein on his forehead, full and angry” (71). Even when Mariam speaks to him he refuses to answer, and continues to eat the bread, staring ahead. Elizabeth Schneider explains in *Battered Women and Feminist Lawmaking*, (2000), “Women’s legally sanctioned subordination within the family denied them equality and citizenship… Domestic Violence threatens not only women’s right to physical integrity but woman's liberty autonomy and equality” (13). In the story, this puts Rasheed’s actions in relation to Miriam within the ambit of domestic violence, his dealings undermine Miriam’s dignity...
and creates in her a sense of inequality. The young fifteen year old who has had household duties thrust on her on account of her early marriage is not shown any sympathy or understanding. Her husband refuses to eat or speak to her to make her feel guilty and make her aware of the ‘blunder’ she has committed. She is expected to be perfect, to do things with clockwork precision. A delay of a few minutes is a treated like a major lapse and provokes a strong reaction from her “forty to forty-five year old” husband who should know better than to inflict such psychological cruelty on her by refusing dinner. She is relieved when the holy month ends.

But the festival of Eid brings no respite. On this day too Mariam is reminded of her status as a woman and Rasheed’s views of women yet again. He tells Mariam to stay away from Fariba who wishes her Eid Mubarak. Calling her a “noisy gossiper” and her husband “a mouse” who fancies himself some kind of educated intellectual because he allows his wife the freedom to move around without a burqa. This sequence shows the control that a husband exercises over his wife, she is not even allowed to speak with a woman her husband does not approve of. The interaction between Laila’s house and Rasheed's house provides the reader with a sense of proximity between Laila's world and Mariam's world, which though seemingly distant in their lifestyles, are actually very close together as both the women go through similar degrading experiences. This is the author’s way of showing that though women may be different in upbringing and background, their destiny of fortitude and the tribulations they have to bear remains unchanged.

Following Rasheed and Mariam's “honeymoon period” in which Mariam begins to find herself content, Mariam’s marriage takes a turn that it is not only sour, but also violent. Mariam becomes pregnant, as every good wife should. The thought of motherhood brings happiness and a sense of worth for the passive Mariam. During her pregnancy. She feels that she has finally achieved something great in her life and Hosseini relates: “When Mariam thought of this baby, her heart swelled inside of her. It swelled and swelled until all the loss, all the grief, all the lowliness and self-abasement of her life washed away. This was why God
had brought her here‖ (80, 81). Once again, Mariam finds herself hopeful for a change in her life with the prospect of her pregnancy. Yet, as is consistent with other points within the novel, Mariam’s hope is crushed with the loss of her first and subsequent pregnancies.

Mariam attributes the loss of her baby to a jinn, the jinn is seen as a karmic symbol of justice for past actions. In this case, the jinn stealing Mariam's baby is a consequence of Mariam causing Nana's death. Thus, according to her, motherhood is the only reason of a woman’s life, the only fulfilling factor for a woman, motherhood is the ultimate goal a woman aspires to, without becoming a mother a woman is incomplete. This is echoed in Rasheed’s behaviour too. When she loses the baby, he is unhappy and sits in his room smoking cigarettes all day and leaves Mariam to deal with her loss alone. Also, since the loss of the baby, Rasheed is more irritable and complains more about everything, Mariam’s cooking, cleaning, etc. He stops buying any gifts for Mariam. He also feels irritated when she talks to him. In addition to this, he also denies her a burial ceremony for the dead child, something that Mariam says would make her feel better, and Mariam is left alone to bury her dead child’s suede coat and say a few prayers to deal with her sorrow. Not only does pregnancy signify the main role of a woman in Afghanistan, but also clearly not being able to bear children has changed the way Rasheed views Mariam. It seems as if their life together is hopeless. Mariam remembers her mother’s words, “As a reminder of how women like us suffer, she’d said. How quietly we endure all that falls upon us” (82). Over time, Rasheed becomes verbally and physically cruel towards Mariam. He ultimately becomes abusive to his wives and daughter, to the point of near murder and the women’s endurance is tested to its final limits.

Again Mariam is overcome with guilt for losing the child and feels jealous of other women “and their wealth of children” (83). She blames herself, Rasheed, god variously for the loss of her child, and these thoughts cause her to feel more guilty. Rasheed’s behaviour changes too, now that Mariam is not carrying his child anymore he is more critical of her work and much less attentive, so much so that he does not even look at her when speaking to her. and “Mariam wasn't ever
sure if she was being spoken to” (89). He insults her and as if all the psychological violence was not enough even inflicts physical violence on her. Khaled Hosseini writes “It wasn't easy tolerating him talking this way to her like she was nothing but a house cat. But after four years of marriage, Mariam saw clearly how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid. And Mariam was afraid. She lived in fear of his shifting moods, his volatile temperament, his insistence on steering even mundane exchanges down a confrontational path, that, on occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks” (89). These serve to remind readers of the long-term physical and psychological violence that Mariam endures in her marriage.

Khaled Hosseini’s depiction of the next four years Mariam life serves to reinforce the dismal life of women like Mariam in Afghanistan. After losing the first baby, Mariam conceives six times but each time she is disappointed. With each failed attempt Rasheed grows more resentful and “Now nothing she did pleased him” (90). For in such a system a woman is only a child-bearing machine, and, Mariam has failed him in this. Not that she does not try to please him “she cleaned the house, made sure he always had a supply of clean shirts, cooked him his favorite dishes. Once, disastrously, she even bought makeup and put it on for him” (90). But nothing works without her being able to give him the all important baby. The ensuing hostility is best explained in Hosseini’s own words: “Now Mariam dreaded the sound of him coming home in the evening” (90), when she hears the familiar sounds of his moving around the house in the evenings, “her mind wondered what excuse he would use that night to pounce on her. There was always something, some minor thing that would infuriate him, because no matter what she did to please him, no matter how thoroughly she submitted to his wants and demands, it wasn't enough” (90). In this way, the imposition of motherhood as the sole function of a woman is emphasized by Hosseini.

In fact, the idea of motherhood as the singular fulfilling factor in a woman’s life is so well internalized by them that if a woman is unable to produce offspring, she herself doubts her self-worth and this happens to Mariam too. Hosseini gives evidence of the psychological warfare let loose on Mariam “Now
cooking was an exercise in heightened anxiety. The *qurmas* were always too salty or too bland for his taste. The rice was judged either too greasy or too dry, the bread declared too doughy or too crispy. Rasheed's faultfinding left her stricken in the kitchen with self doubt” (91). In the Afghanistan that she inhabits, Mariam is not given any proper medical advice, perhaps she is too young and weak to bear a child. If her body was allowed some rest, possibly she could carry a baby to full-term but all this is denied to her as perhaps to other women like her. Instead what happens to her is that more violence — physical, sexual and psychological—is inflicted upon her, her husband beats her for every real or imagined act of commission or omission. Rasheed not only continues to criticize her cooking, but even forces her to eat stones once in an unreasonable fit of anger, over the rice she has cooked, leaving Mariam at the end of Part One with two broken teeth and bleeding from the mouth. This incident furnishes important information to the readers. After Rasheed forces Mariam to chew on rocks, it becomes clear that there is no love within the marriage and love between Rasheed and Mariam will never evolve.

4.3.4 The Trauma of Sexual Violence

An important kind of violence against the female sex is sexual. Subhash Chandra Singh points out: “Women’s sexuality is just one another important area of women's subordination and, oppression. Women are obliged to provide sexual services to their men according to their needs and desires” (23, 2005). This statement referring to another form of violence against women is substantiated at many stages in the novel. In the duration of her marriage, Mariam is subjected to sexual violence which stops only when Rasheed marries Laila for then Laila becomes the target of the sadistic acts, the sexually violent behavior continues all the same. The first incident Mariam undergoes is worth recounting. In the early years of their marriage, one Friday, the traditional holiday in Afghanistan, Rasheed proposes to show Mariam around the city of Kabul. Seeing the buildings of Kabul, eating ice-cream, having lunch in a restaurant, all of which she is doing for the first time in her life make Mariam very happy. However, the next sequence depicted in the novel attests Subhash Chandra Singh’s statement. Soon enough,
Mariam realizes the significance of the excursion with Rasheed that day. Rasheed wastes no time, that very night, he forces himself upon her. He goes to her and has sex with her, his right as a husband. Mariam is unwilling and afraid but Rasheed cannot wait any longer. He is bent upon exercising his right over her that very night.

Rasheed’s aggressive act can be considered for all intents and purposes as marital rape. Subhash Chandra Singh continues, “Marital rape is also one of the extreme forms of violence against married women. After marriage, the women are obliged to provide sexual services to their husbands irrespective of the recipients’ wishes and desires” (23.24, 2005). Hosseini makes it clear that sex has no pleasure for Mariam and he gives out Mariam’s reaction, “she let out a whimper. Mariam closed her eyes, grilled her teeth” (69), for all that she had to endure. For her the sexual act is painful even, “The pain was sudden and astonishing. Her eyes sprang open, she sucked air through her teeth and bit on the knuckle of her thumb” (69). There is no love or emotion in the act for both, for Mariam it is something she has to suffer compulsorily, for Rasheed, it is a way of satisfying his biological urges “when it was done, he rolled off her, panting” (69). Moments later his urge satisfied, he leaves Mariam alone in the room “leaving her to wait out the pain down below” (70). This then is part of her wifely duties, enduring the pain every time her husband needs sexual appeasement. Subhash Chandra Singh maintains: “After marriage, a wife is regarded as the sexual servant of her husband rather than an autonomous self-determining person” (24, 2005). Singh’s assertions are true of characters like Miriam in the fictional account.

For women like her there is no love, pleasure or satisfaction in the act of sexual love but rather one more duty to perform, one more violent act to bear without complaining about the pain. For Rasheed, sexual love is linked to notions of possession and ownership. Mariam is his wife and, he has a right over her body, whether this gives her any pleasure or not. Religion too gives him this authority. In order to support his action Rasheed tells Mariam, “There is no shame in this Mariam,” he said, slurring a little. “It's what married people do. It's what the prophet himself and his wives did. There is no shame” (70). The situation for
Mariam, although bad enough gets worse when she loses her baby. Hosseini tells the readers; “He…sometimes came back in the middle of the night for a brief and, of late, quite rough session of coupling” (85). The trauma of the loss of the baby is conjoined with even more severe sexual violence and the woman has to bear the double burden of the loss of her child and the forceful behaviour of her husband who releases his frustration in his aggressive actions.

4.3.5 The Hypocrisy of a Male-Dominated Society

The bigotry and double standards of men are in evidence throughout the novel. Rasheed’s treatment of his newly wedded wife as more like a maid than the wife points this up early in the novel. Mariam knows that when visitors come to wish them, she is supposed to stay upstairs although it is she who cleans up all the mess made by the men on their Eid visits, even though she has an upset stomach. While the man of the house goes out visiting friends she is left alone to take care of herself. She becomes the domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social living. Mariam’s behaviour when this happens to her is revealing too. Patriarchal and religious views are so inbuilt in her mind that she doesn't mind being left out like this, rather is even flattered by his “protectiveness” as “her honor, her namoos” (74) is worth guarding for her husband, Rasheed. Not once does she consider that she too has a right to enjoy the festivities.

Another episode that stands out in this relation appears later. While cleaning the house, Mariam chances upon some magazines belonging to Rasheed. Khaled Hosseini describes what she sees, “On every page were women, beautiful women, who wore no shirts, no trousers, no socks or underpants. They wore nothing at all” (75). Mariam feels drugged by the sight of these pictures. The burqa wearing Mariam is shocked at the fact that women can be photographed in this way and men like Rasheed who forbid their own women from even showing their faces to other men have no scruples about seeing naked women themselves. As Khaled Hosseini elaborates “In most pictures, their legs were apart, and Mariam had a full view of the dark places between” (75). Mariam, brought up on a diet of a woman’s honour and shame feels distaste thinking “How could they allow themselves to be photographed in this way?” (75). Other questions come up
in her mind. “Was this what he did then, those nights that he did not visit her room?” (75). An inquiry such as the one Mariam has would be a natural thought in a wife’s mind in similar circumstances and in a more equitable relationship, a wife could demand an explanation.

However, so inherent is the inequality in Mariam that instead of feeling annoyed at the unfairness and deceit in her relationship with Rasheed, doubts about her own self come up, “Had she been a disappointment to him in this particular regard?” (75). More questions present themselves shortly. “And what about all his talk of honour and propriety, his disapproval of the female customers, who, after all, were only showing him their feet to get fitted for shoes?” (75) Khaled Hosseini verbalizes her thoughts further “A woman's face, he’d said, is her husband’s business only. Surely the women on these pages had husbands, some of them must. At the least, they had brothers” (75). The double standards employed by Rasheed and men like him are clearly evident here but Mariam is only confused; she thinks more, “why did Rasheed insist that she cover when he thought nothing of looking at the private areas of other men’s wives and sisters?” (75). These questions have Mariam in great bewilderment and turmoil. But, they do not produce in her anger or discontent over her lot and the discrimination inherent in this situation.

It is not that Mariam is completely unconcerned, she is affected. She thinks hard and an explanation presents itself to her. She reflects: “He was a man, after all, living alone for years before she had moved in. His needs differed from hers” (75). V. Geetha in Patriarchy (2007) explicates her views, “Sexuality itself, therefore, emerges as ‘naturally’ having to do with male pleasure and conquest...the seeming ‘natural’-ness of male pleasure and the absence of notions of female pleasure...both affirm the power of dominant men, as well as set down rules for the practice of pleasure” (166, 167). In the patriarchal system, a man may have two standards, but the woman, has no such rights. He has sexual needs, an appetite for sex but not so the woman. “For her all these months later, their coupling was still an exercise in tolerating pain” (75). Mariam believes that god created men and women unequal “His appetite was fierce, sometimes bordering
on the violent. The way he pinned her down… He was a man…Could she fault him for being the way God had created him?” (75). Evocatively, these are Mariam’s own thoughts, she believes Rasheed, a man has his needs and wants merely by virtue of being a man. She does not see anything amiss in the circumstances; she is not allowed to have any biological desires.

Mariam is affected by all this but knowing her own status in the society of which she is a part, she also knows that she cannot confront Rasheed about this, “It was unmentionable” (75) for her. She ponders a little, “But was it unforgivable?” (75) she thinks but only briefly. Thoughts of the treatment meted out to her mother soon induce her to think that Rasheed’s misdeeds are not so enormous. Besides in keeping with her lowly status as an illegitimate daughter, she does not even have the right to pass judgment on others. In fact she later feels guilty for being intrusive and looking at Rasheed’s belongings. She thinks, reflecting about what new information she has collected by prying around his room, “that he was a man with the needs of a man” (76). Being a woman, of course, she has no needs. This reveals the underlying approach to sexuality, the concept of sexuality as a purely physiological requisite of males only and sex as exclusively a male licence.

At the police station in Torabaz Khan Intersection, the duplicity of the male is revealed once more. Submitting her to an intense questioning and penetrating gaze, the police officer, tells Laila, “You do realize, hamshira that it is a crime for a woman to run away… You can be imprisoned for running away” (237, 238). Laila is flustered and her pleas of innocence are of no avail for the men are together as one in this kind of treatment of women. For the police officer: " 'It's a matter of quanoon, hamshira, a matter of law' " (238). It is ironical that men like the officer can talk of order, “in the face of all that the Mujahideen factions had done-the murders, the lootings, the rapes, the tortures, the executions, the bombings, the tens of thousands of rockets they had fired at each other, heedless of all the innocent people who would die in the cross fire” (238). Unconcerned about the violence that Rasheed will let loose on the two women, the officer only replies: “What a man does in his home is his business” (238). Laila's
inquiry about the position of the law when a man is beating up his wife elicits the response: “As a matter of policy, we do not interfere with private family matters, hamshira” (238). A wife running away from an abusive husband is a question of law and order, a matter that is public and and needs to be addressed collectively but, the husbands beatings are 'a private matter' as they affect only the women, there is no need to redress this situation lawfully.

One more instance is the time after Rasheed’s murder, when Mariam is sent to the Walayat women’s prison in Shar-e-Nau near Chicken street. Accentuating further the condition of women, Khaled Hosseini informs readers that they were in prison not for violent crime but “for the common offence of running away from home” (322). Interestingly, Mariam, who has committed a murder becomes a kind of celebrity: “The women eyed her with a reverent, almost awestruck expression” (322) perhaps because she represents their pent-up, feelings, she has done something that they too would like to do, if they could muster the courage to kill a man-their husband. Khaled Hosseini explains through the story of just one woman Naghma. Naghma was promised by her father to a man who is a tailor by profession, thirty years older than her; who “smells like goh, and has fewer teeth than fingers” (323). She loves the son of the local mullah and tries to elope to Gardez with the young man. But they were caught even as they reached the outskirts of Kabul city. What happens to both is a telling comment by Khaled Hosseini on the duplicity employed by men. For Naghma's lover was flogged until he repented for his crime and confessed that Naghma had seduced him with her feminine charms by casting some kind of spell on him. When he promises to rededicate himself to the study of the Koran, he is freed. But such concessions of 'confession' or 'repentance' are not available to the woman. Naghma is sentenced to five years in prison, What is more is that, she is happy to be imprisoned for her father has sworn to slit her throat the day she is released. Being in prison, at least ensures that she is alive. Naghma's story reminds Mariam of her mother Nana's words “Like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman-Always” (323). In such societies, the blame, even for a man’s fault is always has to be shouldered by the women, a situation that they learn to accept.
4.3.6 Under the Taliban: Political Changes and Women

The pre-Taliban era was a bad one for the women of Afghanistan. They faced physical, psychological, sexual violence in addition to the double standards of men. Soon the situation changes. Rosemarie Skaine in *The Women of Afghanistan under the Taliban* relates (2002), “On September 27, 1996, the ruling members of the Afghan government were displaced by members of the Islamic Taliban movement” (7). When the Taliban comes to power, more atrocities are stocked up for the women. Rasheed’s affinity for the Taliban allows readers an additional insight into his sexist attitudes, and the way he can use the Taliban reign to gain even more power within his household. Brian Forst remarks about women in Islamic societies, “In extreme cases, such as under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, women are barred from education and routinely subjected to domestic violence and gender apartheid, frequently to genital mutilation, and sometimes to severe community sanctions if their dress or conduct is regarded as even slightly provocative and hence out of line” (112, 2009). This is the case with the women in the novel.

The laws of the Taliban are even more severe than Rasheed’s have been. These rules are told to the people through loudspeakers in trucks, on mosques and radio and through flyers thrown on every street. The rules for women are as follows:

*Attention women:* 

*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.*

*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.*

*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.

Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately.

Women are forbidden from working.
If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death.

Listen. Listen well. obey. (248, 249).

Such strict edicts affect all the women equally whether they are educated or uneducated. Mariam’s life was bad enough, so was Laila’s but the decrees of the Taliban are harsh and the penalty of defiance is even harsher as the accounts of Laila’s doctor and teacher disclose. Larry P. Goodson writing about the problems in Afghanistan elucidates in *Afghanistan’s Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban*, (2001), “The Taliban, however, have made the issue of women’s roles and status a cornerstone of their Islamization program. Indeed, policies toward women and girls, in conjunction with law and other policies, in many ways constitute the centerpiece of Taliban public policy” (118). For the Taliban women are contemptible creatures (249). It is their dressing up, wearing jewellery, painting their nails, etc. that corrupts the men, they cannot be trusted to move about alone on the streets, they are to be escorted by men wherever they go, ostensibly to protect them but actually to keep them under surveillance.

Rasheed tells Laila that they are enforcing the rules followed by the South, the East and tribal areas of Afghanistan. What according to him is the real Afghanistan, Rasheed of course supports the Taliban's anti-women stance as the directives of the Koran. He explains the implications to Laila, “Let me explain,” he said. “If the fancy should strike me…I would be within my rights to give Aziza away…Or I could go to the Taliban one day, just walk in and say that I have my suspicions about you. That's all it would take”. (252). Laila is appalled, not simply because of Rasheed’s views but because she knows that that every word Rasheed had uttered was true (253). This revelation imparts an immediacy to the situation
of women and particularly that of Laila, who has had a sexual encounter with Tariq before marriage to Rasheed. So for Laila as for other women, Rasheed’s words could literally come true. Khaled Hosseini has remarked in an interview (2009), “When the Taliban came; they imposed inhumane restrictions on women, limiting their freedom of movement, expression, barring them from work and education, harassing them, humiliating them, beating them.” In the novel evidence of this comes when Laila is repeatedly beaten up by Taliban members when she goes out alone to visit her daughter. In addition, the descriptions of the inhuman conditions in the women’s hospital and the miserable circumstances there reinforce the conduct of the Taliban towards women.

4.3.7 Dissimilar Similarities of Women in Afghanistan

Hosseini depicts the disparities in the upbringing of the two female protagonists e.g. Laila’s father wants to educate her. He sends her to school, her relationships with others like her teacher and friends are quite different from that of Mariam whose mother thinks that endurance is the only education necessary for a woman, also Mariam’s interaction with others is not pleasant at all. In this way Hosseini brings out the fact that however different a woman’s life in Afghanistan, yet it is similar as both the women meet in the same place and live under the same roof. Laila’s father, Hakim provides a completely different view of education for women compared with Nana. As a parent, Hakim hopes for a bright future for Laila, and he has faith that his daughter will be successful in the future. This is a stark contrast to Nana’s advice to Mariam that school would be wasted on her. By providing insight into both Mariam and Laila’s childhoods, Hosseini develops the characters of both women. Such distinct contrasts can be seen between their upbringings that the reader can begin to more thoroughly understand the characters of the two women as adults.

In specific scenes that parallel each other, such as Hakim educating Laila versus Nana’s emphasis on endurance, the reader gets the chance to understand the key differences between Laila and Mariam. Nevertheless, the fact that both eventually marry the same violently abusive man goes to show that at this phase in
time, misfortune is rife in the lives of women in Afghanistan irrespective of educational and financial status. The division of the novel into four main sections on the basis of subject matter is used adroitly by Hosseini to highlight the disparities and likenesses. The first part focuses on Mariam, a child of illegitimate birth who was raised in a small hut outside of the city of Herat. This part gives a picture of Mariam’s life as a poor and illegitimate child. The second section centres on Laila, who is a generation younger than Mariam. Laila’s upbringing is different, she is born in Kabul to parents who are better placed and her father hopes that she will contribute to Afghan society. The third part follows the intersection of Mariam’s and Laila’s lives. In the last part, the two women’s lives move on separate courses. This division of the novel helps to bring into focus the initial difference in the lives of the two girls and the later similarities, showing that in such a way of life women are subject to the designs of men and no woman whether born legitimate or otherwise, educated or not is safe.

The alternating chapters in part three of the story juxtapose the lives of both Mariam and Laila. This section with one chapter devoted to each woman underlines the close physical and experiential proximity between the two. Several examples illustrate the analogous pattern of the existence of the two women. So, for Mariam, a woman in Afghanistan, even her first day out with her husband is not a wholly happy situation as she has to first wear the burqa, which Rasheed helps her to put on as she has never worn one. Elaborating on the discriminatory attitudes against women in some Islamic societies Allan S. Mohl in “Religious Fundamentalism and its Impact on the Female Gender,” states “The Muslim custom of purdah, in which women are secluded in the home and prohibited from public appearance without elaborate and complete body and face covering, is the logical end of such beliefs. It is in such societies that the equation of female purity and family honor is strongest and the power of men the greatest.” Mohl’s assertion is supported by the events in the novel in the form of the experiences of Mariam and Laila. Khaled Hosseini describes Mariam’s experience when she wears a burqa, “she practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on the hem and stumbling. The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving, and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth” (65). Also,
she moved around the city of Kabul with Rasheed, “tripping now and then on the burqa’s hem” (65). The woman does not have an option in the matter of her veiling herself, so that other men do not see her face. Her willingness is assumed.

When Laila goes out into the street with Rasheed, her experience with the burqa mirrors that of Mariam, Khaled Hosseini recounts “For Laila, being out in the streets had become an exercise in avoiding injury. Her eyes were still adjusting to the limited, gridline visibility of the burqa, her feet still stumbling over the hem, she walked in perpetual fear of tripping and falling, of breaking an ankle stepping into a pothole” (208). Another instance is the first pregnancies of the two with the associated troublesome expectations. As soon as Mariam becomes pregnant for the first time, Rasheed chooses the name Zalmai for his unborn son. Khaled Hosseini puts in writing “If it’s a girl,” Rasheed said, “and it isn't, but, if it is a girl, then you can choose whatever name you want” (79). He wants a male heir only and will not have anything to do with a female child who will be exclusively the mother’s responsibility, another comment on the status of women and a girl child in particular in this scheme of things. Rasheed refers to the child in male terms only, refusing to think of the possibility that the child could be a daughter also. He makes a crib for his son, buys a suede winter coat, worries about everyday objects in the house “You can't be too careful. Boys are reckless creatures” (79), he says. This adds to Mariam’s burden who wishes that he wouldn’t hitch his hopes on the child being a boy. “As happy as she was about this pregnancy, his expectation weighed on her” (79) Hosseini divulges. One more burden a woman has to bear in this world: that of producing a male heir.

Again when Laila reveals the news of her being pregnant to Rasheed, Hosseini tells his readers “He had immediately hopped on his bicycle, ridden to a mosque, and prayed for a boy” (205). Now it is Laila who is under pressure to produce a male heir for only male children are valued, if it happens to be a girl, that will cause distress. Still again, Laila feels similarly fearful when Rasheed speaks of the baby as a male child only. All this serves to bring out the fact of the similarity of experiences in the lives of Mariam and Laila, two Afghan women who belong to totally different backgrounds but are forced to share the same
unhappy household and by extension the experiences of all women in Afghanistan.

4.3.8 Bonds of a Common Identity

The violence faced by the women, the commonality of their experiences induces them to come together in a common cause, that of dealing with the violent men. Suzanne Prescott and Carolyn Letko in “Battered Women: A Social Psychological Perspective” (1977) observe, “While violence in marriage could be expected to have few positive effects, most women (84%) could pinpoint at least one positive outcome. They reported that violence had helped them to become more independent. Many indicated that they were able to establish relationships by reaching out or seeking others” (84, 85). In the novel, it is the common fear of Rasheed’s irrational violent behavior, his cruelty towards them that brings the two women, Mariam and Laila closer. There are several points in the account where both understand the trauma that Rasheed’s actions are causing to the other. Rasheed trades Mariam's old wedding ring to buy Laila a new ring, he lets her know this fact; to win over her love but Laila does not approve of this action. When the insensitive husband tells Mariam about the pregnancy of the other wife, only a woman Laila herself understands Mariam's state of mind. Khaled Hosseini recounts, “Laila was there when Rasheed sprang the news on Mariam in a high dramatic voice. Laila had never before witnessed such cheerful cruelty” (205). But, being a woman, Laila notices Mariam’s suffering at dinnertime, this makes her miserable and she cries later in bed. At several junctures Laila also takes up for Mariam to save her from Rasheed’s violence and this helps to forge a bond between the two women slowly but surely.

In the early stage, Laila hides from Rasheed the fact of their first true fight, the two women had called each other names, shouted at each other, raised but not hurled pots and pans. Again Hosseini’s clear enunciation of this small detail stresses the fact that women are not so violent as men. Besides Laila and Mariam's first big fight over the spoon and the oral violence, that accompanies it serves as a catharsis for the two of them. It not only a releases their pent-up anger and
frustration toward Rasheed, but also about their unfortunate situation with Rasheed, though the words may have been directed towards an undeserving party. The fight also appears to serve as a device to bring Laila and Mariam closer together. As Hans Toch points out in \textit{Violent Men} (1969), “Violence, ironically, creates harmony among otherwise warring elements” (33). Later, Laila saves Mariam from Rasheed’s blows. This act is unlike any other that Mariam had experienced in her life thus far as no one has ever stood up for her before. The tension between Mariam and Laila thus lifts; Mariam appreciates Laila for defending her. They finally become sociable.

This is the commencement of the formation of a common identity between the two women against a universal antagonist. Then, the baby takes forward the relationship. Mere cordiality grows into friendship when Laila thanks Mariam for the clothes that she gifted the baby. At this juncture, Laila sees Mariam in a new light, “it was not an adversary's face Laila saw but a face of grievances unspoken, burdens gone unprotested, a destiny submitted to and, endured” (223). That night Mariam too realizes that Laila means no threat to her and that she is as much a victim as she herself is. Closeness develops even though it is through the unfortunate experience of Rasheed’s violence. Perhaps echoing Nana’s words to her daughter, tahmul-endurance, Mariam warns Laila of impending violence and danger; for in this setup, women have to endure, to undergo hardships. When Laila says that she will not get used to being beaten, Mariam tells her: “He'll turn on you too, you know” (223). She adds: “And you gave him a daughter, so you see, your sin is even less forgivable than mine” (223). In a society where only the male heir is wanted, not giving birth at all is better than giving birth to a daughter

The final bond of love, trust and friendship is formed over tea and halwa in the backdrop of more violence “As gunfire cracked in the hills” (224). The bond is sealed when Rasheed, shouts out for Laila to come and silence the baby, “a look passed between Laila and, Mariam, an unguarded, knowing look. And in this fleeting, wordless exchange with Mariam, Laila knew that they were not enemies any longer” (224). Ironically it is the overtones of violence in Rasheed’s voice, the danger of violent behaviour ensuing if the baby is not quietened that helps cement
the relationship between the two wives. The two women unite in a bond against the violence of one man. Words are inadequate to describe the unusual connection between the two women, who start off as adversaries but forge a bond; based on their dislike for a common antagonist, their husband. The commonality of their undesirable experiences helps the formation of an all-purpose union to defend themselves and help each other against their husband. Shirin Kudchedkar and Sabiha Al-Issa in *Violence against Women, Women against Violence*, (1998) while admitting that the issue of violence against women is a complicated matter also add that they do not wish to present a totally negative picture. They write: “Rather we wish to bear witness to the determined struggle of women themselves against such violence, their banding together to support and rescue their victimized sisters” (1). In a society like that of Afghanistan, coming together in a group is perhaps not possible for women but the intimacy of at least two women is representative of the resolute effort of women.

**Conclusion: Self-Empowerment through Concord**

In this chapter, both novels through the depiction of domestic violence against women offer to the viewers, strategies of coping with this kind of violence. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Brick Lane*, the authors suggest the policy of self-empowerment of women through confluence and convergence. In *Brick Lane*, the female characters develop into self–empowered women by coming together and refusing to accept their destiny unreservedly. The main theme in *Brick Lane* is the role of fate in shaping one's destiny and of women altering the course of fate. “The central theme of the novel is that, although limited by circumstances, we make our fate” states Bruce King, (91, 2004). When Nazneen is born sickly, the midwife tells her mother that she can take the baby to the hospital, or just leave her to her fate. The new mother chooses to wait and see what will happen. As they grow up, Nazneen and her sister Hasina are taught that fighting fate can be fatal. Their mother, “Amma,” teaches them that nothing can be changed and that everything must be borne but significantly Amma kills herself when the girls are still small, thus ensuring that she changes the course or at least the duration of her fate and suffering. The other women in the novel subsequently
take charge of their lives. They help each other out and show sympathy and empathy for their sisters which are reciprocated. By accepting the gift of kindness, the recipient gives back the greater gift of trust. A belief in common humanness, a mutual recognition of shared experience, a mirror in which they see themselves in the other persons’ place. They have nothing much to gift but they can gift themselves. They authorize themselves to be the masters of their lives. There is perhaps no better bargain in the world. This is the agreement that the women in *Brick Lane* put together. Thus the women in *Brick Lane* form bonds of shared experiences.

In this way, the theme of self-empowerment is developed within all the major storylines in *Brick Lane*. Nazneen goes from being a complacent daughter and wife to an independent woman who makes a difference in her own life and in the lives of others. Mrs. Islam, a wealthy widow, keeps her power in the community by being a ruthless money-loaner. Hasina, who is strongly opposed to the philosophy of waiting and suffering, makes every effort to make a happy life for herself. Lovely, though relatively better off than the other women in the novel, also strives to reach a certain level of achievement and self-worth by forming a charity to help children deliberately burned by acid. Razia, who is fiercely independent, takes English classes and rebels against her husband when he refuses to let her work. Razia also gets a job after her husband dies and unburdens herself of other cultural shackles (like the sari). She then earns her British citizenship. By the end of the novel, Razia helps to empower her friends as well when she sets up a sewing business. Even Amma, who encouraged her daughters to accept everything that life gave them, takes control of her own life in her final act of suicide. Almost all the women in the novel felt they would do better (and did indeed they do better) without the men in their lives. The power is within them and they simply find it.

Similarly, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the two female protagonists Mariam and Laila suffer great physical and mental hardship but discover soon enough that they cannot surmount this while in competition with each other. This makes them unite and join hands against a much stronger adversary. It is their
teamwork that formulates their ultimate success and the destruction of their tormentor. Mariam becomes the symbol of all those women who suffer the violence of patriarchs and the Taliban members in her country. Khaled Hosseini may have left Afghanistan but continues to desire to understand the causes and effects of violence that leave lives shattered in his country and the society in utter chaos. He explains in an interview:

I spoke to many of those women in Kabul. Their life stories were truly heartbreaking. For instance, one woman, a mother of six, told me that her husband, a traffic policeman, made $40 a month and hadn’t been paid in six months. She had borrowed from friends and relatives to survive, but since she could not pay them back, they had stopped lending her money. And so, every day she dispatched her children to different parts of Kabul to beg at street corners. I spoke to another woman who told me that a widowed neighbor of hers, faced with the prospect of starvation, had laced bread crumbs with rat poison and fed it to her kids, then had eaten it herself. I met a little girl whose father had been paralyzed from the waist down by shrapnel. She and her mother begged on the streets of Kabul from sunrise to sundown. When I began writing A Thousand Splendid Suns, I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over. Though no one woman that I met in Kabul inspired either Laila or Mariam, their voices, faces, and their incredible stories of survival were always with me, and a good part of my inspiration for this novel came from their collective spirit. (2009).

The atrocities Mariam and Laila and other women characters in the novel undergo would have wrecked most women but Khaled Hosseini builds women whose spirits remain unbroken. This is wrought by the women’s act of coming together to form a common force against a universal opponent. The women in the novel forge strong bonds despite the efforts of their husbands and their government to reduce women’s power. The bonds differ in nature. For instance, Giti, Hasina, and Laila form a bond of girlish friendship, but Mariam and Laila form a much more powerful familial bond later in the novel. Nana finds strength from her daughter Mariam, and Mariam finds a female aficionado when she arrives in a Taliban-
controlled prison. The novel thus suggests that women have a strong ability to find strength and support in one another although their lives cross with poignant tragic results. It is the formation of this amalgamated individuality that sustains them in the face of great adversity. It is this that confers on them the courage that helps them to carry on, indeed to live. Mariam never would have gained the strength to fight Rasheed if she had not gained confidence and love from Laila. Without Mariam’s memories to sustain her, Laila would not have mustered the strength to return to her mother country to be a part of the revival of her nation where conditions are improving for all and “women returning to work” (345), to go back as a proud Afghani to take part in her county’s progress. Her going back is a symbolic victory for all the women victimized by violence in her country. The women of Afghanistan are victims with wrenching stories and yet they are also symbols of hope, signs that times are changing and that women are fighting back helped by their own unity.