Chapter-4

Sexual Colonization
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Colonization/Colonialism- Internal and Sexual

Although the term 'colonization' derived from the Latin 'colonus' which means 'a farmer' (Calvert 53) renders it a word related to the agrarian society but the term has been widely used in political, cultural and social senses. Earlier colonialism or colonization simply referred to the condition when one agrarian society was colonized by another who was more advanced and modern, the aim being to exploit the resources of the former. With the advent of industrialization the colonization took a new face and “using the slogans of 'nation-building' and 'development' to justify their actions, Third World governments have employed the full panoply of powers established under colonial rule to further dismantle (sic) the commons” (Calvert 52). In this affair millions of people lost their homes to make way for industries, tourist resorts, roads etc. Thus it referred to physical conquest usually within, not across, the political and geographical boundaries. Peter Calvert writes in an article:

'Internal colonialism' was used ... by Lenin in 1896 to describe the Tsarist autocracy's creation by force of the Russian Empire as an internal market for capital centred in St Petersburg and Moscow. In a similar sense the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies used 'internal colonization' in 1996 to refer to the physical conquest of the non-Han peoples in China by the government of the People's Republic. (51)

In fact the theory of internal colonialism is a critique of the discrimination on the basis of race. It explains the oppression of African-Americans and other people of color in the United States, particularly people of Mexican and Puerto Rican background, Native Americans and African-Americans as internal colonies, and includes a strategy for the elimination of racism. This critique agrees with Marxists in
seeing capitalism and accumulation of wealth as the root of racial oppression but for them, nationality or race relations are not reducible to class relations and the class struggle. “The notion of ‘internal colonialism’ as the dominance of one race over another appears in a different context when Stokely Carmichael and Charles V Hamilton, writing in 1967, use it to describe the situation of black people in the USA, and even more recently in descriptions of the subjection of minorities in Africa, notably in Rwanda and Burundi” (Calvert 52). In a web article later published in a book Readings in Black Political Economy (1999), Peter Bohmer writes about ‘Internal Colonialism’:

Moreover the term was used in the similar context to describe the subjection of minorities in Africa, notably in Rwanda and Burundi. The intellectual origin of this theory was the written and spoken condemnation of European colonialism and the putting forward of an anti-colonial national liberation strategy by Kwame Nkrumah, and most influentially, Frantz Fanon. Early proponents of this theory in the United States such as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Turé), were inspired by anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements in the Third World, and their victories in Ghana, Cuba and Algeria.

Even before that ‘colonialism’ was used in 1957 by Leo Marquard in African context. Sergio Salvi used the term in his book The forbidden nations: Guide to ten internal colonies of western Europe (1973).

The word ‘internal’ was appended with ‘colonization’ because in the meaning explained above the colonization was not possible without the cooperation of the internal people, mostly the elite and upper middle class. Moreover such a colonization occurred mostly within a country unlike neocolonialism where the source of exploitation comes from outside the country.
'Sexual colonization' is a modified term where one of the sexes is colonized by the other in different ways and manifestations. As already explained in the earlier chapters, it is mostly the woman who is oppressed and dominated by man. However within Afghan context "attributing direct cause of women's oppression to religion, culture or individual men's nature would be erroneous and would serve to reify gender rather than de-gender society as it ignores socio-structural causes of such oppression and takes facilitating variables as the actual underlying cause of oppression" (Asadi 25). Usually the terms like 'subordination', 'subjugation' 'domination' etc have been used for this social disparity but I appended the word 'sexual' with 'colonization' to explore how, in the novels under study, women characters are colonized as a sex, which has been happening since time immemorial in almost all societies. Further 'sexual colonization' also connotes sexual harassment. How women have been sexually colonized in the novels constitute the essence of the phrase. Sexual colonization in the novels is directly related to the seclusion of women which mainly manifests in the form of 'purdah' in different forms. In both the cases the suffering is inevitable and extreme. As it happens in colonization, the colonized subject is left with no option other than to be exploited by the colonizer, in the case of man-woman relationship, woman suffers as a colonized being. The phrase 'Sexual colonization' has been further used to probe into the minds of the women characters who are made to believe that they are duty bound both in moral and social sense to remain subordinate to their men who may be in the form of a brother, a husband, a father or a son. Religion, culture, morality, social institutions etc are used to make them believe that they have no way out of this predicament. Nonetheless there are female characters in the novels who try to and succeed to various extends in 'de-colonizing' themselves from the clutches of society in general and men in particular.
The term ‘Sexual Colonization’ brings a better picture of the novels concerned than any other terms like ‘subjugation’, ‘domination’ and ‘oppression’. Siba Shakib says in *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*:

Women in Afghanistan have never had much. But since the Russians came to our country, since the mujahidin have been fighting their wars, since the Taliban seized power in parts of the country, women have lost even their last rights and their last freedom. They have lost everything. Their honour, their dignity, their knowledge. (125)

**Colonization and Home**

The major cause of sexual colonization in the novels is the ‘home’, the most important feature of Afghan society. It forms the ground on which other factors rest. It is associated with the ‘being’ of an individual. Most of the female characters themselves feel insecure once they are outside their homes because of the sexual violence they may face outside. However it is ironical that the ‘safety’ of home may not provide them safety as the enemy or perpetrator of atrocity is at home in the form of relative. Nonetheless there are women like Aziza who work outside. There are women like Daria, Shirin-Gol and Samira who have no home at all. And there are women like Mariam and Laila who escape from the ‘home’ in order to save themselves from the brutality of ‘the owner of the home’ i.e. their husband Rasheed. Yet Shirin-Gol’s concern for her home brings catastrophe for her. Even the law permits the man to do whatever he likes with his wife. It is highly ironical when Laila and Mariam are caught and the officer says to them, “What a man does in his house is his business . . . As a matter of policy, we do not interfere with private family matters, *hamshira*” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 238). Radical feminists’ stand for ‘the personal is political’ strongly refutes the above stand taken by the different
institutions of society. They assert that “a variety of relationships that occur in the home need to be thought of as political” (Chancer and Watkins 35). Kate Millet, in particular strongly advocates that “so-called personal domination that occurs in the private sphere of domesticity was equally worthy of exposure and politicization” (Chancer and Watkins 35).

Other major factors which act as the weapons of colonizer are marriage, sex, family, tribal culture, religion etc. Moreover society too plays its part in their colonization. On a superficial level one may blame the male characters only, usually the husbands, but this would not be a correct and safe conclusion. In fact for a woman, marriage has been used as a mirage of safety where the person who is supposed to be her custodian and protector clips her wings and keeps her within the strict patriarchal norms of a society. Though such colonization of women is considered more prominent in the under developed and tribal countries but it is a universally situated phenomenon. In the patriarchal culture of Afghanistan, marriage represents an area considered as part of the public world and therefore, a decision negotiated by the male head of a family with no say whatsoever of a woman. After marriage within the four walls of a ‘home’ a woman is supposed to behave in a particular manner on the pattern suggested by Rousseau in his book *Emile* (1762) that a girl should also learn how to manage a home and a family (366). In fact both ‘family’ and ‘home’ can be used in an inter-related manner within the context of this study as home gives a sanction to the concept of family. Though Rousseau wrote *Emile* with the purpose of presenting a document regarding the education of Emile (man) and Sophie (woman) yet it throws an ample light on man-woman relationship within the domestic realm. It may be said that Rousseau’s views regarding women reflects his parallel objective of defining a ‘woman’. Rousseau believes that a woman
should know how to clean and cook; how to do the shopping and keep the family budget (357). He adds:

The man should be strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive; the one must have both the power and the will; it is enough that the other should offer little resistance.

When this principle is admitted, it follows that woman is specially made for man's delight. If man in his turn ought to be pleasing in her eyes, the necessity is less urgent, his virtue is in his strength, he pleases because he is strong. (322)

His general and idiosyncratic view about the gender relationship which Kate Millett condemns in her *Sexual Politics* as, “Coming from a man who contributed so much to the French Revolution, Rousseau's impressions of proper education for women were as reactionary as they were influential...” (74) can be guessed from his two statements i.e., “Vague assertions as to the equality of the sexes and the similarity of their duties are only empty words” (325) and “the law of nature bids woman obey [sic] the man” (Rousseau 370).

For Kate Millett, a radical feminist, family is the main institution of female subordination. Veronica Beechey writes, “The most fundamental unit of patriarchy in Millett's analysis is the family, which she considers to be a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole; it functions to socialize children into sexually differentiated roles, temperaments and statuses, and to maintain women in a state of subordination” (68). Throughout her book *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett argues that patriarchy in almost all the societies- although patriarchy can exhibit a variety of forms in different societies- work on two principles i.e. male shall dominate female and that older male shall dominate younger male. She stresses upon the first of these two principles, the domination of women by men which may be called 'sexual colonization'. In this
regard, Veronica Beechey simplifies Millet and writes, "Women are conceptualized as being a minority group within the dominant society, and differences among women are considered to be insignificant by comparison with the divisions between women and men; to be mere differences in 'class style'" (68).

Gayle Rubin's two major essays, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" and "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" considered as basic documents to queer theory, has an underlying assertion where the subordination of women is located "in the most conventional and socially valued form of heterosexuality, the exchange of women in marriage" (Vance 135). Carole S. Vance analyses Rubin's both essays and asserts that both the works combined form "a long rumination on the political economy of heterosexuality, sexual hierarchies, and sex law that portion out "natural" forms of heterosexuality from the "unnatural," and moral panics that selectively mobilize and direct public attention and outrage to particular forms of sexual danger while ignoring others" (135). In her essay "Thinking Trafficking, Thinking Sex", Vance further refers to Emma Goldman's influence on Rubin and echoes Goldman; "late-nineteenth-century crusades against "white slavery" and the "traffic in women" (prostitution) were misguided sideshows, which diverted attention from and action against the underlying causes of women's oppression: marriage, the family, and political economy" (136).

Marxist feminists too agree with the notion that it is the family under capitalism which acts as a main source of women's oppression. Throughout The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1845), Friedrick Engels argues that due to their economic dependence on men in such a system, women are
oppressed. Marxists believe that capitalism is the root cause of all evils and for the emancipation of women capitalism has to go.

According to Engels, the beginning of women’s oppressed status coincided and grew gradually alongside the development in human history of private property relations. Why? One reason is that surplus arose in the hunting rather than the domestic sphere of human activities. Once a given tribe, clan or group began producing more than it actually needed to sustain and reproduce itself, an embryonic form of private property developed. Moreover, because surplus developed in the sphere of activity that was dominated by man, the problem arose of how to identify who was a legitimate heir . . . Engels suggests that, with the emergence of private property, woman become a form of property and often carried dowries along with them; they would be traded between tribes and possessed few, if any, rights of their own. Thus the institutionalization of monogamous marriage transformed intimate sexual relationships into opportunities for accumulation, much to the detriment of women. (Chancer and Watkins 25)

However Engels believes that labour class women are less oppressed than bourgeois women as the former are economically independent to some extent vis-à-vis their husbands whose impoverished condition forces them to seek employment outside the home (Tong, 49-50), which results in their better condition in the home.

Colonization within the Four Walls

In Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep, Shirin-Gol’s mother who has eleven children, has to work all the daylong and give birth to children like Daria in Samira and Samir who is supposed to give birth to ‘sons’ for the Commander and cook and clean for him. Same is the story with Mariam and Laila in A Thousand Splendid Suns. Shirin-Gol’s mother remains busy with “the work she had to do for her husband and her three sons, tilling the field, baking bread, sewing clothes, tending the sheep. Milking the cows, making meals, weaving carpets and whatever other tasks
came her way” (Shakib, Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep 10). Daria cooks “fresh, warm bread” (Shakib, Samira and Samir 4) and does all the work for her husband who justifies, “Spreading out the bedding is women’s work” (Shakib, Samira and Samir 74). Though Daria’s husband is shown to have a soft corner for her, she gets answerless when Samira asks, “Did your husband respect you?” (Shakib, Samira and Samir 219). Daria’s silence is an answer in itself that she has been never respected by her husband. Towards the end when Samira gets into an argument with the butcher, Bashir “holds her back, drags her away” (273) and insists that it was Samira’s fault and not his.

When Shirin-Gol’s twin brothers grow up, they realize their male value in the family in particular and in the society in general. They realize that after their father and elder brothers leave for war they become the head of their family. The two never fail to remind Shirin-Gol that she is a woman and that she has to live under their will and command. When the family registers for the Pakistani refugee camp, an Afghan fellow advises the twins, “from now on you are responsible and no one else, you understand? Make sure that the sia-sar [black-headed] in your family do not raise their voice in public, it’s unseemly” (Shakib, Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep 72). When Shirin-Gol tries to interfere, she is harshly rebuked:

I wasn’t asking you, replies the man, you are probably another of the ones who fell into the hands of the godless Russians and lost your shame and decency in one of their schools. Disgrace, disgrace, a thousand times disgrace, curses the Afghan and spits greenish-yellow stuff into the sand at Shirin-Gol’s feet, where it settles and dries. (Shakib, Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep 71)

At another place, Abina’s husband asserts that she has to obey him. He justifies to which Abina says nothing and lowers her eyes, “Your father passed on to me his
responsibility over you and his God-given right to determine you and your fate. If you won’t obey me anymore, I will take you back to him” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep* 119). The below extract reflects a more generalized picture of the status of women characters in relation to their men:

> The women talk about men who beat them. They talk about their husbands’ second, third secondary wife, who treats them badly. They say that for weeks and months they haven’t been outside or even had any fresh air. The women say that their visit to the doctor, to which, on the top of everything, they are accompanied by their husband, son, father, brother or uncle is their only chance of getting out of the house. (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep* 149)

Though Siba Shakib too, like Khaled Hosseini is accusative of the Taliban regarding the oppression of women but the below quoted lines uttered by one woman to her sister reflects that husbands are more oppressive than the Taliban: “your husband did not let you walk in the street even before the Taliben came to the village. You were not allowed to come to my house, your own sister’s house” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep* 186).

> In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* whenever there are any visitors in the house, Mariam has no right to talk to them. She is literally imprisoned till the guests leave. Whenever there is a knock at the door, “Mariam knew to go upstairs to her room and close the door” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 73). After their marriage, Rasheed proved to be a big bully particularly when he knows that Mariam cannot give him a son.

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, and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 89)

Mariam with “a face of grievances unspoken, burdens gone unprotected, a destiny submitted to and endured” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 223) does all the household work but nothing pleases Rasheed. In fact, Rasheed is a kind of psychopath who has no control over his anger and manifests it in the form of physical violence. Though Mariam, “cleaned the house, made sure he always had a supply of clean shirts, cooked him his favorite dishes” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 90) yet “no matter what she did to please him, no matter how thoroughly she submitted to his wants and demands, it wasn’t enough” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 90). In their relationship there is no reciprocity as it is only the wife who does everything possible for her husband and in return gets blows and kicks.

Rasheed takes it his natural right to beat and insult Mariam. Once he takes a trivial excuse of uncooked rice and “shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 94). As a result Mariam breaks her two molars.

Rasheed’s stratagem in his marriage with Laila adds to Mariam’s woes and she gets doubly colonized. In an effort to impress Laila who is “the malika of his palace” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 221) though for some time, Mariam becomes the subject of his ridicule. His double standard is depicted in his advice to Laila in front of Mariam:

I ask that you avoid leaving this house without my company. That’s all. Simple? No? If I am away and you need something urgently, I mean absolutely need it and it cannot wait for me, then you can send Mariam and she will go out and get it for you. You’ve noticed a discrepancy, surely. Well
one does not drive a Volgo and a Benz in the same manner. That would be foolish, wouldn't it? (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 200)

Laila too loses her value soon when she gives birth to Aziza. Though she becomes friends with Mariam, she invites Rasheed's wrath. Though she too passes her days in his service like Mariam but nothing pleases him. The situation becomes worse when they plan to escape from his clutches but land in prison. Once back, Rasheed anger knows no bonds. “Laila did not see the punch coming. One moment she was talking and the next she was on all fours, wide-eyed and red-faced, trying to draw a breath. It was as if a car had hit her at full speed, in the tender place between the lower tip of the breastbone and the belly button” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 239-240).

Mariam too is beaten badly and Laila, locked in a room can hear, “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, something, someone, hitting a wall with thud, cloth ripping” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 240).

What adds to their physical oppression is that Rasheed's shop gets burned down and he stays all the day at home. Now “He slapped Aziza. He kicked Mariam. He threw things. He found fault with Laila, the way she smelled, the way she dressed, the way she combed her hair, her yellowing teeth” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 271). Towards the dénouement of the novel the graph of violence goes sharply up until Rasheed's death. Just before his death he intends to kill Laila by choking her throat. When he comes to know about Laila's meeting with Tariq, he beats both the woman.

Mariam lost count of how many times the belt cracked, how many pleading words she cried out to Rasheed, how many times she circled around the
incoherent tangle of teeth and fists and belt, before she saw fingers clawing at Rasheed's face, chipped nails digging into his jowls and pulling at his hair and scratching his forehead. How long before she realized, with both shock and relish, that the fingers were hers. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 309)

Rasheed is partial towards Aziza as well. When his shop burns down, he decides to send her for begging. Later he sends Aziza to an orphanage unlike Zalmai only because the latter is a boy. Even before all this happens, he brings expensive toys for Zalmai but looks at Aziza with disdain. Her crying for Rasheed is, “like someone is ramming a screwdriver into my ear” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 212) and for Zalmai his patience “was a well that ran deep and never dried” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 264). In spite of abject poverty, at the time of his birth, “He had bought him a new crib and had lions and crouching leopards painted on the side panels. He’d paid for new clothes, new rattles, new bottles, new diapers, even though they could have not afford them and Aziza’s old ones were still serviceable” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 263). All this he does with the borrowed money which he gets from his friends.

**Veil as a tool of Colonization**

In spite of Hosseini’s struggle to de-stereotype the myth of *burqa* as a sign of oppression as explained by Jessie M. Nixon in her thesis, there runs deep a vein of ‘sexual colonization’ in its use. For Marilyn Herbert, Khaled Hosseini has used *burqa* as a symbol of “anonymity” which “diminishes and almost eliminates their female presence in a male-dominated society” (53). *Burqa* is there in Afghan culture for centuries but it has no religious sanction according to an Afghan student in Aligarh Muslim University. In a personal interview she says, “Islam is not saying this [sic],
our face and our hands should be open” (Shahir). She adds that it was there before the Taliban but the women exercised freedom of choice. Herself in a scarf which only covers the wearer’s head, she reports, “Burqa or chaddri is still in use even in big cities like Herat but the new generation of women does not like to wear it. Yes women wear it for shopping. In weddings [they] go without it” (Shahir). In fact “The control over purdah lies largely over the eldest male household member” (Moghadam 212). For Marnia Lazreg, burqa has no religious sanction and has been used in the Muslim world according to the political and social conditions. As a Muslim, she believes that it is “a historical, if not the most historical, exhortation and therefore amiable to change” (Lazreg 101). She writes, “No man has the right to dictate to a woman what color and length of dress she should wear. This is the most blatant abuse of power” (100). No doubt Mariam and Laila take it the other way- already discussed in the preceding chapter- but from a male point of view it becomes a tool in Rasheed’s hands which he uses to confine them from the external world. Kelly A. Drevitch writes, “in addition to the physical and psychological stigma, the compulsory burqa also generated an economic burden for many women, as they could not afford to purchase a burqa” (71). Qasim Amin, an Egyptian scholar does not find any compelling religious reason for woman to cover her, face, hands and feet. In his book The Liberation of Women he writes: Muslims were attracted to the use of veil, approved it, exaggerated its use, and dressed it up in religious raiment, just as other harmful customs have become firmly established in the name of religion, but of which religion is innocent” (37). Arline Lederman gives a detailed historical account in her essay titled “The Zan of Afghanistan”:

According to some scholars, the heavy tent like veil worn by women in the Near East and eventually by Muslims started with upper-class Christian
women of the Ottoman Empire. For status, safety and comfort, they were frequently carried about in curtained sedan chairs, which were similar to the sedan chairs of the Hindu aristocracy or European royalty. The chairs enabled riders to avoid the mud of rough roads that would sully their finery. The coverings offered privacy and protections from thieves and from dust. Some Near Eastern historians believe that the complete covering was an imitation of upper class Christian female style rather than a Muslim religious requirement. (50)

Ahmad Zaki Yamani, a great Islamic scholar too resonates the same idea in his book *Women in Islam*, “women were not hidden behind veils, except for those who used to wear it as a habit, but these were few and far between. Indeed, the veil which covers the face is prohibited to wear during prayer and when the woman is in the state of consecration, or *ihram*, during the pilgrimage or the *umrah* [mini-pilgrimage]” (31). Another renowned Indian Muslim scholar Moulana Wahiduddin Khan writes, “a woman’s face is not included in the parts of the body that need to be compulsorily covered” (141). To prove his point he refers to an authoritative Arabic book titled *Hijab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* by a famous scholar Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani which he translated into Urdu for a quarterly “Islam and Modern Age.”

Rasheed justifies its use through his experience at his shop and relates it with the honor of a woman. He says:

The women come uncovered, they talk to me directly, look me in the eye without shame. They wear makeup and skirts that show their knees. Sometimes they even put their feet in front of me, the women do, for measurements, and their husbands stand there and watch. They allow it. They think nothing of a stranger touching their wives’ bare feet. They think they’re being modern men, intellectuals, on account of their education, I suppose. They don’t think that they are spoiling their own *nang* and *namoos*, their honor and pride. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 63)
Rasheed believes, "a woman's face is her husband's business only" (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 63) but his hollow religiosity is revealed when Laila discovers pornographic magazines in his room. It shows that he talks of a sacred husband-wife relationship but does the opposite in practice. This aspect of his personality comes to light in his deceptive help to Laila as well. He saves her from the blast site with an eye on her young body though he tries to prove to be altruistic when he explains the reason to Mariam behind his second marriage:

Think of it this way, Mariam. I'm giving you help around the house and her a sanctuary. A home and a husband. These days, times being what they are, a woman needs a husband. Haven't you noticed all the widows sleeping on the streets? They would kill for this chance. In fact, this is . . . Well, I'd say this is downright charitable of me. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 193)

Shirin-Gol in *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* represents Afghan women in general as Siba Shakib writes, "Shirin Gol's story isn't unusual, it relates the very normal madness that thousands of women and other people have experienced and continue to experience in Afghanistan, either like this or in a very similar way" (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 8). Siba Shakib's treatment of burqa is quite different. She chooses a more extreme view than Khaled Hosseini. For her in burqa women have no identity at all and "women's shoes are the only way of recognizing them" (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 2). Shakib believes that burqa "dehumanizes them" (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 3) and "the fine net in front of her eyes is too dense to give even the faintest impression of her eyes" (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 2). Burqa is imposed on Shirin Gol as is done with Mariam and Laila. When she is young, she is rebuked by her older brother for not wearing her burqa. "She recognises him as one of her older brothers and smiles. Her brother does
not smile back, asks, why aren’t you wearing your *burqa*?” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 13). At another place when they cross the border of Afghanistan, she is ordered by one of her twin brothers, “Put your veil over your face” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 57).

**Colonization in Marriage**

For Afghan girls, modesty is the most essential element of good breeding; girls are required to keep their heads down in public, to cover their heads in front of males, and to avoid interaction with boys. Girls are slated if they did not follow these norms. These expectations grow with the age of a girl. Moral standards are closely linked to sexuality, therefore mobility, expression, and social interactions are not considered woman’s domain. A typical rural Afghan woman marries young and has many children and hardly has a say in the decision of marriage or in the selection of her marriage partner. Nojumi, Mazurana, and Stites write, “Countrywide, 16 percent of girls are married under the age of fifteen, while 52 percent are married by the time they turn eighteen years old” (74). This has its impact on their future married life as they do not have access to proper health care, making Afghanistan one among the countries with highest maternal mortality rate.

A recent report by UNICEF on global indicators estimates that 1,900 women die for every 100,000 births in Afghanistan. Other Afghanistan-specific studies provide a more nuanced picture of these statistics. For instance, a 2002 study conducted by UNICEF, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Afghan Ministry of Public Health (now the Ministry of Health) estimates Afghanistan’s maternal mortality rate (MMR) to be 1,600 for every 100,000 live births and shows extreme discrepancies from one part of the country to the next, as well as between urban and rural areas. To illustrate, in Kabul city the MMR was only 400, but rose to 2,200 in Kandahar. (Nojumi, Mazurana, and Stites 74)
There are some women who wish for greater participation in public life but the centuries old male monopoly in public life has made them feel that they are in their correct role as dictated by tradition, culture, and society. But most Afghan women do perceive Afghan women’s position and role in society as adhering to custom and tradition and do not seek to alter this role. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam is married at a young age of fifteen with a man of fifty. Her willingness is not taken into consideration and Jalil decides her fate. In the same manner Daria’s and Gol-Sar’s marriage in *Samira and Samir* is decided by their fathers.

Although considered an Islamic country and most of the past governments crowed that the rule of the land had been based on the Islamic *Sharia* but tradition and custom has always played a more important role in influencing the legal systems than the *Sharia*. Thus “much of Afghan society is governed not by legislated laws but by customary law combined with local interpretations of *Sharia*. These interpretations may vary based on the judicial body hearing the case, the nature of the offense or claim, and the standing of the parties within the community” (Nojumi, Mazurana, and Stites 93). In fact the social structure of Afghanistan is based on “*gaww* (communal group) and *gabilla* (tribe)” (Moghadam 208).

The liberal and bold women who can raise question marks on the social set-up dominated by patriarchy are suppressed to remain mute. We see Azadine is forced by the Taliban to get married so that “she would not be rebellious, so that there would be someone keeping an eye on her” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 259). In Afghanistan a man can acquire a wife in one of four ways:

He can pay a bride price, gain a bride in marriage, inherit a widow, or receive a bride as compensation for a crime committed against him or a relative. The first method is the most common and the other means of acquiring a bride
usually involve variations on the payment and receipt of bride price (Kamali 84–85).

Nojumi, Mazurana, Stites write, “For many Afghans, marriage is a pact between families, not between individuals. Marriage often involves complex sets of tribal and familial relations, financial exchanges, and, at times, compensation for crimes” (104). A woman is considered as the part of property and belongs to her husband. Laila’s and Mariam’s marriage to Rasheed opens readers’ eyes as in both the cases marriage is solemnized against the wishes of women involved. A depressed and shocked Mariam is compelled by Jalil’s wives to marry a man who is more than thrice her age. Rasheed marries Laila by misleading her that Tariq, the person she wanted to marry, is dead. Destiny too plays a part as had Laila not been pregnant by Tariq, she would have adopted some other course of action. In *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* Shirin Gol who is too young to understand the true meaning of marriage submits to Morad’s wish without any protest. When she says, “I don’t know whether I want to get married” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 40), Morad insists, “your brother decided you would” (40). The commoditization of women achieves its height when Morad gives her the reason behind their marriage:

Your brother and I play cards, he lost, he had no money to pay the debts he had with me, he said, you want to get married, I have lot of sisters. And then he said that instead of getting the money I should marry one of his sisters. And I asked which of his sisters he liked best, and then he said he liked Sweet Flower best, and I said, then I’ll marry Sweet Flower (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 40).

Shirin-Gol is given away as compensation for her brother’s loss in a game. Sanctity of marriage is thrown to winds in the story of “girl-woman” (Shakib,
Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep 58) whom Shirin-Gol meets on the Pakistani side of the border. She is inherited by men of a family in succession as they die one by one. She is first married to man who dies after sometime. She is then married to her father-in-law who too dies after a short time. At the end she is married to one of his first husband’s brother (Shakib, Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep 58). The custom of ‘bride-price’ has been introduced in this novel. The Talib named Sher-Dil who wants to marry Noor-Aftab offers a huge sum of money to her parents who take it as they are extremely poor. However the point to be noted is that Shirin-Gol too is willing to take the money and send her daughter off with the Talib. She says to Morad, “Let’s take the money and see what happens. We’ll see” (Shakib, Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep 170). It reflects that somewhere Shirin-Gol too acknowledges this custom which they call “Sheerbaha” (Shahir) in Afghanistan. Shahira Shahir too like other Afghan women takes pride in this custom as she believes that this adds to the value of a woman. Any attempt to change this custom is not acceptable to Afghans as has been witnessed during the communist regime. The communist government constitution in one of its articles (Decree 7) “forbade the exchange of a woman in marriage for cash or kind” (Moghadam 92) which later became one of the reasons behind its collapse as it “deeply angered rural tribesman and the traditional power structure” (Moghadam 93). Actually the roots of ‘Sheerbaha’ can be traced to the concept of ‘Mahr’ in Islam. Mahr, one of the basic conditions of Muslim marriage, is an amount of money “paid directly to the woman, not to her family” (Brodsy, With All our Strength 38) by the groom as a security for wife in case of widowhood or divorce. The base behind this practice is empowerment of woman as it acts as a kind of financial back up for her. Valentine M. Moghadam writes, “But in tribal Afghanistan, walwar [a Pashto word for mahr] is understood to
be compensation to the bride’s father for the loss of his daughter’s labour in the household and is a part of groom’s ownership claim over his wife” (210). Thus as already asserted in this thesis, it is the combination of religion and tribal cultural which accounts for the colonization of women.

It is true that Islam challenged many of the pre-Islamic tribal traditions of the Arabs and introduced reforms that raised the sociolegal status of women to a level hitherto unattainable, given the patriarchal customs of the Arabs. Yet Islam nevertheless left many aspects of the prevailing tribal traditions unchanged; the religion was superimposed on a patriarchal society but did not radically change many of its institutions. Tribalism, therefore survived under Islam, tribal customs continued to exist- sometimes violating the laws of Islam itself. (Moghadam 210)

Thinking the other way round, the custom of *Mahr* and *Sheerbaha* adds to the objectification of women as they are bought and sold like livestock. This can be termed as honourable prostitution as it depicts a kind of paid rape through a socially accepted institution of marriage. It is reminiscent of primitive times when women were sold to rich men as sex slaves. The prices of young girls belonging to poor families are negotiated and they are married to old men. A recent incident narrated by Heidi Kingstone throws some light on the legal aspect of bride price. He writes, “A young girl in Afghanistan was sold twice, once for US$2,000 and again for US$5,000. The case came before a judge. He ruled that the man who bought the girl for US$5,000 was her husband and so the girl should stay with him. In other countries and in other contexts, this would clearly be seen as slavery” (37). One Talib comes to Shirin-Gol and Morad and tries to pay them more money than agreed by Sher-Dil to get hold of Noor-Aftab. Such an instance is in *Samira and Samir* as well where “The men talk, negotiate the price for the bride. Ask questions, give answers, say But, say No, say Yes” (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 7). Another episode reflects the extremity of
commoditization of women where Hadji wants “oven-fresh wife” (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 154). He buys such a wife from “Firouza’s father [who] had debts with the Hadji. Debts that he could not pay. And then the Hadji said he would let him off his debts if he gave him his daughter as his wife” (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 153). The Hadji has a bad reputation and always wants “wives who are young and beautiful. Who, with their youth and beauty will make him young and satisfy his lust (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 146).

Due to poverty in the war ridden Afghanistan, families gave their daughters in marriage in order to pay off their debts. Sometimes young girls were married to much older men due to financial reasons and this practice violated the basic human right of these girls. Despite some attempts by many rulers to abolish these marriages and bridal dowries as well increase the minimum age for marriage, most of the Afghans largely ignored these reforms. In fact, religious mullahs often fought against any reform. From a patriarchal perspective, marriage and bride price represent an economic exchange between two families and a way to gain social status. In Afghanistan culture, marriage usually serves as a way to build political alliances or gain financial wealth. In some regions, families exchange cows, bull, sheep, goats, or furniture in an exchange for the bride (Emadi 39). Forced marriages also serve as settlement of family feuds. Sometimes women were exchanged to settle the crimes committed by the male members of a family. Nojumi, Mazurana, and Stites talk about this *Pashtun* custom called *Bad* or *Badal* which is more prevalent in rural Afghanistan. They define it as “a practice among *Pashtun* tribes to resolve serious crimes such as murder. This legal custom mandates that the family of the perpetrator gives a young girl in marriage to the family of the victim. (She may be married later if
she is very young at the time of the exchange)" (108). Although this practice has no place in Afghan law, it goes on especially in those rural parts.

The sociocultural foundation of badal developed in response to the custom of revenge killings. Afghan tribal communities have suffered continuous bloodshed from cycles of revenge killings that may continue for generations. The custom of badal was designed to convert the two opposing families into one family and to stop the killing of young men. (108)

However the irony is that in such a practice a woman is denied her humanity and is never given the option of rejecting the deal.

As money is one of the most decisive factors for the social structures so in a society like Afghanistan which is ethnic and caste conscious, gender intertwines with the class and economic status of a person to decide his/her worth. The result is bias against a particular class, mostly the weaker one in terms of material. Moreover being a woman and then being poor comes as a catastrophe as Nana says, “Like the compass of a needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman” (Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns 7). In A Thousand Splendid Suns, Nana is ill treated as she has no financial support. She is sexually exploited by Jalil and when their affair is exposed Jalil absolves himself of all the guilt by saying that it was she who “forced” (Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns 6) herself on him. This reflects sexual hypocrisy on his part. Jalil is not held responsible at all and the event does not affect his life but it creates havoc in Nana’s life as Hosseini writes:

When that happened, Nana said, the collective gasp of Jalil’s family sucked the air out of Herat. His in-laws swore blood would flow. The wives demanded that he throw her out. Nana’s own father, who was a lowly stone craver in the nearby village of Gul Daman, disowned her. Disgraced, he packed his things and boarded a bus to Iran, never to be seen or heard again. (Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns 6)
However society proves to be stronger than man as there is a slight trace of remorse in Jalil’s heart but he is not able to stand against the social and cultural forces. The social compulsions demand that Nana should not be allowed to live in his house anymore. Nana says, “Jalil didn’t have the *dil* . . . to do the honorable thing. To stand up to his family, to his wives and in-laws, and accept responsibility for what he has done” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 6).

**War, Law and Order and Women’s Confinement**

War deprives Laila of the maternal love when her mother starts sleeping all the day dreaming of her dead sons. Due to war Laila, who always dreams of getting higher education in life, leaves the school as the streets become so unsafe that one of her school mates Giti gets blown into pieces on her way back from school. All the four novels show war at its worst and the power struggle among the war lords brings more destruction than the war with Russians. In this war Afghans are being killed on the both sides. This war among the warlords can’t be better described than in the words by Tariq, who says, “militiamen stationed in the mountains sharpened their marksmanship- and settled wagers over said marksmanship- by shooting civilians down below, men, women, children, chosen at random” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 158).

War separates Tariq from Laila as she is not ready to leave her parents after the death of her brothers. This separation proves to be a real wreck later when they get separated for years together with Laila under the impression that Tariq is no more. Had there been no war there would have been no separation and the course of their life might have been better. The war snatches away her parents; moreover it snatches
away her future. The rocket which blasts her home and kills her parents and leaves her in a half dead condition to the mercy of Rasheed.

Laila knows that somewhere in the city someone had just died, and that a pall of black smoke was hovering over some building that had collapsed in a puffing mass of dust. There would be bodies to step around in the morning. Some would be collected. Others not. Then Kabul’s dogs, who had developed a taste for human meat would feast. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 169)

In Laila’s marriage with Rasheed, Mariam- the victim of patriarchy and Laila- the victim of war join together to find a way for their deliverance. This marriage not only brings cataclysm for her but for Mariam also as she gets deprived of the value and position, which she already has almost none, in Rasheed’s house.

Unlike Laila Mariam never comes face to face with war. War compels Laila to compromise and marry Rasheed unlike Mariam who marries him due to her fate and due to the harsh treatment meted by her father and his wives. However in both the cases they are left with the only option of marrying Rasheed. Mariam and Laila get sandwiched between the war outside and Rasheed in the house. When they try to escape, the war thrashes them back and they are more victimized and tormented by Rasheed.

After the Taliban took control women’s freedom is curtailed even further. They put all possible sanctions on women. The following extract from the novel reflects their bias against the women.

*Attention women:*

*You will stay inside your homes at the 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 circumstances 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.


Women are thus in all cases colonized as commodities during the Taliban period. It is to be witnessed in an extreme form when the lady doctor operates Laila and cannot take off her burqa due to the fear of Taliban. She says, “They want us to operate in burqa” (Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns 259). In the interview, Shahira Shahir, herself a Tajik like Laila remembers every bit of the Taliban rule though she was too young at that time. She says, “Taliban had power in our province [Herat] for almost six years and I too left my studies for a year” (Shahir). She says she had informal education for five years when she used to attend secret classes taught by women teachers. “My mother was a teacher in the university in arts but she too left her duty; she is again a teacher now. She teaches German” (Shahir).

When Aziza is sent to an orphanage by Rasheed, Laila comes face to face with the Taliban whom Azadine calls “confused and lost” (187) in Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes To Weep. During her trips to see Aziza, which Rasheed mostly avoid, she is either rebuked or thrashed by them.
What is your name? Why are you going alone? Where is your mahram?—before she was sent home. If she was lucky, she was given a tongue-lashing or a single kick to the rear, a shove in the back. Other times she meant with assortments of wooden clubs, fresh branches, short whips, slaps, often fists. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 285)

Even under the Mujahidin rule, women are not allowed to come out of their four walls. No doubt the ramifications are not as dangerous as under the Taliban but men and society cannot see them out moving freely. Even when Shirin-Gol and her family are in a refugee camp, “the stinking mullah, the self-appointed camp leader, his lackeys and his Kalashnikov which officially he is not allowed to own, but which in reality he keeps constantly at the ready, do not want girls to walk in public or go to school, or women to work” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 82). At another place when Shirin-Gol goes to collect food for her family, she is asked to “Go home and send your brother” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 78). Later on men shout at Morad, “[S]he has no decency and no dignity. Your wife is dishonouring the *rish-sefid*, the white-beards, the eldest and other men in the camp. Tame her and keep a closer eye on her, or people will end up thinking you are not a real man” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 82-83).

Similar advice is given by her mother when she is young:

Pull your headscarf down your forehead, put on your veil, put your feet in, lower your eyes, don’t speak when your brothers are speaking, make way, get out of the way, do this and don’t do that, because you are a girl. Or do you want people to think you are *kharab* and want them to look at you and destroy our family’s reputation? (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 110)

Actually if Afghan “[women] are seen to deviate from the norm by prominent members in the community, the reputation of entire household suffers, and the male is
regarded as incompetent or unable to control his home affairs” (Moghadam 221). The irony lies in a later event when the same “stinking mullah and the self-appointed camp leader” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 84) approaches Shirin-Gol to read a letter for him. Even when Shirin-Gol joins Azadine in her clinic to serve the people of their village and is welcomed by some villagers, most of them could not see her walking up and down without her husband. They complain that she “Doesn’t lower her eyes. Works. As if she were a man” (*Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 148). An interesting fact is that even woman finds it strange to go out alone. In *Samira and Samir* when Samira asks her mother to come out with her, she replies, “People will talk about me . . . They will say, what kind of woman is that, strolling about the place as though she had no home? People will say, Daria is a bad woman” (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 121). Later after ‘Samir’s’ death when Daria and Gol-Sar start teaching the village girls, “the girls are accompanied by their brothers and fathers, they cling to men or one of the other girls” (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 258).

Siba Shakib too like Khaled Hosseini keeps away from coming to conclusions regarding the treatment of women in the hands of Taliban, mujahidin and the warlords. Through Shirin-Gol, her mouthpiece, she asks the reason behind the atrocities committed against her sex and gets an answer from a Herati man, “Because Taleban are the Taleban” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 271) and “Because girls are girls” (298). Khaled Hosseini, through Hakim enlightens the readers that the question of women which Anne Brodsky calls “politicization of fundamentalism” (*With All our Strength* 39) is the toughest one to answer in Afghan context.
At the time of Laila’s delivery, Mariam realizes that there is just a single hospital that treats women. She had heard the announcement by the Taliban “that all the female staff would be discharged from Kabul’s hospitals and sent to work in one central facility” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 255). The only hospital for women patients is Rabia Balkhi about which a woman says, “They had no clean water . . . no oxygen, no medications, no electricity” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 255). Sima Samar, who worked as physician in the refugee camps of Pakistan, authenticates Hosseini:

In September 1997, their Ministry of Public Health banned female personnel, including physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and technicians from working in Kabul’s twenty-two hospitals and suspended medical services to the city’s half million women, with the exception of the poorly equipped Rabi’a Balkhi facility, which had thirty-five beds and no clean water, electricity, surgical equipment, X-ray machines, suction, or oxygen. (180)

The way in which Laila give birth to her child throws considerable light on the facilities available for women in Afghanistan particularly Taliban period. “Afghan women have historically had one of the lowest health statuses in the world” (Drevitch 102). Although the health facilities and mother care have never been satisfactory in Afghanistan but they deteriorated during the Taliban period. Before them in the 1989, Kabul had fourteen hospitals and five clinics which used to serve both men and women (Moghadam 238) but with the Taliban rule, women who on an average bear seven to ten children (Samar 183) were barred from getting treatment in most of the hospitals. Azadine has to stop her practice during the Taliban period as women are not allowed to work. Shirin-Gol says to Noor-Aftab:

Since the Taleban came to power, they have forbidden Azadine to do her work as before. She cannot go to her patients in their huts now. She cannot go
into the mountains and help the people there. She cannot examine men. Only women who come to her accompanied by a mahram are allowed to visit her. The women who found their way to us from the remote villages and valleys can no longer set off on their own and come to village to see us. If they do take the risk, they and their husbands are punished and beaten. (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 159-160)

Shirin-Gol’s and Daria’s deliveries reflect a worse picture as they deliver their babies inside their tents without any medical aid. Daria manages everything herself from digging up a hole in the floor to cutting the baby’s umbilical cord. As Shakib writes, “One last time she bends over, reaches beneath her belly, breathes violently, utters one final liberating, suffocating scream, pulls the child out of her body, holds the wrinkled, slimy, blood-covered being in her hands” (*Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 10). Her husband, the Commandant is not concerned about her; he only wants his ‘son’ out of her body.

**Sexual Violence**

Afghanistan has a grave history in the sense that rape has been used by the commanders, militia and other forces as a means of revenge and terror and to dishonor the men of a particular tribe. “Rape is common, though “rape with impunity” might better describe the phenomenon in Afghanistan, where women and children as young as three years old have been violated by fundamentalist warlords” (Jalal et al. 132). Women being the ‘property’ and ‘honor’ of men according to the Afghan culture are raped, many a times in front of their family members, in order to avenge upon the men.

Although during Taliban rule the incidents of rapes and molestation decreased due to their strict punishment to the sexual offenders yet Taliban themselves committed a lot of such crimes where the women and young girls of the opposite
factions were abducted and raped. During the years of war between the Russians and the Mujahidin there were almost no laws in practice to convict the offenders and majority of the cases went unnoticed. Amnesty International reports “To the leaders of the armed factions, rape was an effective tool to defeat populations, reduce resistance, and to reward soldiers” (qtd. in Drevich 45). At present there are provisions to punish such offenders but it happens rarely as the victim loses the chances of a secure marriage once the crime gets publicized. So these cases are hardly brought to the notice of the local courts that usually lack sensitivity in this regard. Besides it is considered against the tenants of Afghan culture to discuss such issues openly. Jalali et al. give some sound reasons, “Self-immolation occurs because there is no law and no support for women; rape occurs because there is widespread impunity and rapists are backed by paramount rulers; domestic violence occurs because fundamentalism and ignorance are meshed with the ruling elite; and on and on” (132).

In many pages of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* rape seems to be personified. “Mariam heard of women who are killing themselves out of fear of being raped, and of men who, in the name of honour, would kill their wives or daughters if they’d been raped by the militia” (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 227). The novel actually covers the times around the horrific episode of 9 September when the twin towers were allegedly bombed by the Taliban and ends when Afghanistan is ruled by the present President Hamid Karzai. The war- first with the Soviet, then among mujahidin followed by the American Operation Enduring Freedom to flush out the Taliban- has one thing in common. In all the cases rape and murder of women was widespread. Sima Samar opines, “All sides trampled the rights of Afghan women, each in its own way. Islamic fundamentalism was supported by outside forces as a strategy against
the communists, and it had horrible implications for women, who were forced to take responsibility for upholding Afghan culture and so-called Islamic values” (180).

Though it is there in a warless society as well but rapes during or in the aftermath of the war have different implications. No doubt, more men have been killed as they were directly involved yet the women have been the worst and silent sufferers.

In the novels women are abducted, killed and raped by the other ethnic groups to settle the score. Rape is directly related with the ethnic clashes as ethnic dissent is what which forms one of the basic reasons behind sexual violence. The traditional norms of horror and shame are turned into weapons of war which results in “rape and sexual assault against women of opposing groups as the ultimate means for disgracing entire communities and reducing people’s capacities to resist military advance” (Jalali et al. 134). History bears a witness that in wars women are mostly the soft target for the enemies to take their revenge and this stands most appropriate in case of Afghanistan. The novel, describes in particular, the use of rape against women during Mujahidin period. Rostami-Povey agrees that rape and sexual violence increased during the period of the civil war (1992–96), to unprecedented levels (131) yet there is no data to confirm the vast number of rapes and the degree of violence perpetrated. “In this period, the dangers of assault, kidnapping, rape, and forced marriage were so great, and police or legal protections so lacking, that any attempts at normal daily life for women and girls was done at the risk of harassment, violence, and death” (Brodsky, “Centuries of Threat” 80). Daria’s rape in Samira and Samir objectifies the rapes and war crimes perpetrated during the time of Mujahidin imbroglio against the already wretched Afghan women. “Men rape a thousand and one women. Drag them
away, slit bellies open, sever heads from necks with one quick cut. Men loot, rob, demand toll-money. Legs tear off, hands are hacked off, arms are crushed. Blood sticks to the hands of men” (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 41).

The Soviets leaves Afghanistan in 1989 but the war never ends:

The shelling knocked down power lines, pulverized entire blocks of shops and homes. Laila heard that Pashtun militiamen were attacking Hazara households, breaking in and shooting entire families, execution style, and that Hazaras were retaliating by abducting Pashtun civilians, raping Pashtun girls, shelling Pashtun neighborhoods, and killing indiscriminately. Everyday bodies were found tied to tress, sometimes burned beyond recognition. Often, they’d been shot in the head, had had their eyes gouged out, their tongues cut out. (Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 159)

In *Samira and Samir*, Daria is raped by the two “strange shadows” (*Shakib Samira and Samir* 97) from another village. Though before the second one could “plunge his desire into Daria’s body” (*Shakib Samira and Samir* 98), Samira wakes up and kills him “unintentionally” (98). What is strange and more pain giving to Daria is that instead of taking her side, people of her own village blame her. They blame her of bringing shame and wrath of the other tribe on them. Olfat’s eldest son says:

It is your own fault. Had your mother become my wife, she would have been under my protection, and all of this would not have happened. If we do not hand you over, the father of the dead will come and avenge himself for the death of his sons. Khalass and tamam. That’s all. (Shakib, *Samira and Samir* 100)

What adds to reader’s surprise is that even Daria thinks that it is her fault. Shakib has most probably elabourated the rape scene intentionally in order to expose the hollowness of Afghan code and customs, those code and customs which associate honour with women.
The protagonist of *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* is raped twice; first by the smuggler chief and then by the three Pakistani policemen. Shirin-Gol’s first rape is more of psychological nature in the sense that the smuggler chief creates the conditions in which she cannot deny him the sexual favors. Her poverty is exploited by him as she has an invalid husband and has to feed three children. He sends her gifts and money which she cannot refuse as she has no source of income. Her maternal instinct weakens her as she utters, “For you, my daughter . . . I did it for you. For you, my son. For you, Morad. For myself, so that we can all stay alive” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 91). Shirin-Gol tries to console herself but her inner self always pricks her that she has committed a wrong for which she feels ashamed and “even the knowledge that there is a market in Pakistan where Afghan women are offered and sold like cattle is of no comfort to her” (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 92). She is raped again by the three Pakistani policemen who arrest her from the marketplace where she has gone to buy opium for Morad.

All Shirin-Gol can see is his gold tooth, all the time she smells his rancid breath. The other two policemen do not pay attention to the first to begin with, then one after the other, they too let their trousers down and force their way into Shirin-Gol. After they have all satisfied their stinking lust, they throw Shirin-Gol at the side of the road, leave her there and drive off. (Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep* 98)

The question of the male rape has been raised in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* albeit indirectly. Though Hassan’s rape takes novel towards its strength yet it symbolizes on one level the rape of the oppressed class where a slave is raped in front of his master. As already discussed in the preceding chapter, the Hazaras form an ‘Other’ like the Afghan women. Hassan’s undeterred honesty towards his master
Amir even after he is brutally raped by the “sociopath” Assef irritates rather pricks Amir’s guilty conscious till the end of the novel when he rescues Sohrab from Assef’s hands. Amir sees his final act as a source of redemption for his sin of not saving Hassan from being raped years ago. Hassan gets raped by Assef just because he refuses to hand him over the kite which he chases for Amir. In fact the kite symbolizes his loyalty for which he pays a heavy price. Though he leaves Kabul but later on, on Rahim Khan’s insistence comes back along with his wife and son and is killed by the Taliban because he refuses their entry into Amir’s house of which he is the incharge. Again the symbolic sense of the kite comes to fore, this time with his loyalty for Amir’s house. Earlier he is raped and now he gets killed.
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