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The Concept of Othering in “*A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*”: A Postcolonial Study

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Abstract

Othering is the issue that refers to prevent women from their basic rights. They face discrimination in homes and on work places as compared to men. The study highlights the concept of marginalization in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) and The Kite Runner (2003) by Khaled Hussein. The study of the texts shows the courage of women for empowerment who faced domestic and social fierceness through triple layers of colonization. A qualitative research design was adopted in the current research through the process of Eclectic Approach by applying Edward Said (1995) and Spivak (1999). This research study examines hegemony, militarization, colonization, nationalism, patriarchy and male-dominated culture, women identification, ambivalent stance, Afghani immigrants, subaltern representation of women, basic rights in society and magical realism. The findings showed that women were discriminated in their household and social activities. So the identity of Afghan women is the most significant achievement to defeat othering at all levels.

Key Words: Othering, Subalterns, Basic Rights, Eclectic Approach

Introduction

The study highlights the concept of othering in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hussein. By ‘othering’, we mean any action by which an individual or group becomes mentally classified in somebody’s mind as ‘not one of us’ (Said, 1978). It is sometimes very easy to dismiss or degrade anybody in respect of dignity and status. The study looks into the external and internal conflicts faced by Afghan society.

Afghanistan is a country that is occupied by foreign aggression such as the soviets, internal conflict by the warring (combative) parts of Mujahedeen, and duped under the dictates of the ancient sharia laws of the Taliban. The study of the texts shows the power of courage of women such as

Laila and Mariam. Both faced domestic fierceness. Laila faced surgical birth without anesthesia, was beaten by Talibs, witnessed murders, and threw rocket bombs by Soviets. All these things represent their behaviors towards women. Mariam was an illegal child of Jalil and Nana, married Rasheed without her will. He was an obsessive old man and did not allow her to go back to her parental home. He beat her and forced her to wear a burqa. Soraya’s marriage is based on her parents’ choice, and it is called a marriage of convenience. Sanoubar was forced to wear burqa. Jamila nursed the adopted child. Farzana was shoot to death. These women were not only the victims of colonization by their male heads but also through the foundation of the

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cruelty of rulers, militarization, and Islamic fundamentalism. So they are marginalized through triple layers of colonization.

The study deploys Edward Said and Spivak's perspective of postcolonial theory as a critical procedure to examine Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*. This study also analyzes these texts in order to find out the fertile overlap that presents between postcolonial studies and feminism.

Colonialism brought many cultures of the world, particularly belonging to the East and West, closer to one another. Colonialism leads into postcolonialism as literary discourse has engulfed many cultural changes. It reflected upon historical and political circumstances of the time.

Postcolonial writers try to enhance their own abilities in areas of the world literature that may have been elaborated in the frontier era. The larger project of moving past colonial endowment is called the decolonization of writing. For example, Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* is a research on the history of Pakistan.

Most of the third world countries, including Afghanistan raised under the shade of colonial rule. These Countries made developments with the passage of time. Postcolonial novels of the 1950s were necessarily the studies of cultural colonialism, native identity, and anticolonial battles.

[De Souza \(2014\)](#) indicates in the poem *If You Want to Know Me* the worst aspects of colonial rule, the end of the identity, bodily pain, and complete deny of culture. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* fiction constantly questions the European-generated image of the concerned colonialism. The doings of Achebe is to reveal the cruel, greedy, and harmful colonialism. The main feature of colonial cruelty is control over language. Language becomes a source which is a hierarchical structure of power to maintain and helpful in the establishment of a nation. Such power is dismissed.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The theory is the explanation that is used to practice actually. It is the basic supporting structure to elaborate the analysis of the characters. Eclectic

approach is the strategy used by more than one person to approve the theory. The theoretical framework of current study will allow to investigate an individual as well as combined effects of discrimination, family barriers, male culture, and women's traditional life. Eclectic Approach of postcolonial theory is the theoretical framework.

Edward Said (1978) coins the term orientalism to describe the way in which a fantasy orient (his focus is primarily what the West calls the Middle East) is projected and then inscribed upon the lands and people of the region. Gayatri Spivak is a cultural critic who combines elements from deconstruction, feminist theory, and Marxism. He Collects many key essays by which *Can The Subaltern Speak* is one of the foremost postcolonial writing. *Can The Subaltern Speak* a collection that provides a lucid entry point into Spivak's intellectual realm? In establishing the Postcolonial definition of the term subaltern is not just a word for 'oppressed', for the other. In postcolonial terms, oppressed are not allowed to speak.

The research methodology is qualitative in nature. The textual analysis is made by seeking help from the text books, library resources, and the internet. Text is analyzed on a descriptive basis. Eclectic Approach is made in the representation of fiction. This analysis is based on the burning issues of 'others' and marginalization. The identity of of Afghan women is the most significant achievement to defeat othering at all levels.

Literature Review

The concept of othering and marginalization of women is an irritating and problematic issue of human life. But in spite of the work done by other researchers, still, the women's life is in darkness. They are not provided the equal rights. Works of different writers have been explored to show the critical situations of women.

[Shakespeare \(1606\)](#) says, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport" (line: 37, p. 149). Destiny destroyed the lives of women in the hands of gods who, for their pleasure, are very cruel towards women. [Hardy \(1886\)](#) says that life is in the grasp of a cruel, sightless, and tyrannical unknown will. This grasp of cruelty 'will'

damage the life of women through their lovers in the hands of their husbands (p. 383). Both the writers deliberated the dominance of male culture over women. She says to herself, how I have tried and tried to be an impressive woman.; I do not deserve my lot; she cried in an emotion of bitter rebellion. O, the brutality of keeping me in this ill-conceived world; I was capable of much, but I have been injured and destroyed and trampled by things beyond my control, how it is hard of heaven to develop such tortures of me, who have done no damage to heaven at all (1891, p. 420).

[Tagore \(1916\)](#) in the same way, employs a review on Indian feminine roles in the early 1900 with Bimala and Sandip offering traditional influence. He explains that Bimala has eager to extend her freedom; the external world desires to ban this eagerness, to which Bimala responds, "let it die, for all I care"! (p. 23). In spite of this, Nikhil persuades Bimala to depart her home sphere, and she slowly changes to being outside. He elaborates on feminine traditional role. Men have chauvinistic attitudes. Women's love for men may be a prison. They have no patriarchal love.

Butler (1956), the American feminist, has contributed much to the marginalization theory. She has written several books, among which *Gender Trouble*(1990) and *Bodies That Matter*(1993) are the two most significant. It has been observed that Butler asks questions about the formation of identity and subjectivity, tracing the processes by which men become subjects and women as objects.

[Kristeva \(1977\)](#), as a western Feminist and psychoanalytic critic, presented Chinese women by giving a universalizing and even same racist supposition. Julia Kristeva says something universal about feminism. China came up as a model society, but in spite of this fact, their women also face the same type of discrimination faced by third-world countrywomen. She demanded that she wants to create an 'open-ended' solution for the hardships of Chinese women. [Spivak \(1988\)](#) presents double colonization through her act of interpreting of lower rank. She presents in her writing the problems of poor people or poor tribes, farmers, women, low casts, and the working class. Spivak's most famous slogan is white men are saving brown women from

brown men. This statement is ironic about saviors, rescue, and supposition of superiority in 2000s thinking.

[Sidhwa \(1991\)](#) talks about the devastation of women in *Cracking India*. It is not an autobiographical novel. What she found was that people dislike talking about it; everyone refuses to remember abducts and devastation that happened to men and especially to women. Being a woman herself, Sidhwa paid attention to the circumstances of women in that risky period. By discovering the combined repressed and giving a voice to its female victims. She means to say that the works of women are not appreciated, but they are forced, they are attacked by the ill-killers. [Crenshaw's \(1993\)](#) concept of intersectionality fills this gap of gender differences. Intersectionality means a person with multiple identity components and grounds for oppressions and sufferings at once, like race and gender differences. Muame (1999) stated that men and women are assigned different jobs in the same society. This attitude refers to the discrimination between men and women on the basis of their identity; such attitude plays an important role in their lives.

Textual Analysis of Othering

Text becomes significant when it is analyzed and interpreted perceptively. The major focus of this study was to analyze the effects of othering in terms of their contributing hurdles, which affect the progress of women, specifically in Afghanistan. This research study examines the othering effects on the household activities of women and its contributing factors. Soto attain the major and central objectives, relevant points are critically assessed through textual analysis. A qualitative research design is adopted in the current research through the process of Eclectic Approach.

European culture has its strength and identity against the orient. Edward Said stated both the geographical regions as opposite sides of a mirror. By privileging on the side of the occident, the images reverse each other like a mirror. East is constructed by Europeans that relaxes a real relationship of supremacy and domination between East and West.

The orient was filtered by western consciousness. A textual analysis prevailed over orientalism.

Violence or destruction is an alarming account of the human liberty that has been associated with Afghanistan's changing political scene in the last thirty years. Texts give a vivid picture of not only the Russian atrocities but also those of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. They used to beat their women severely. This colonization and militarization is observed in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Hosseini stated, "The woman's knees buckled under her and she slumped to the ground. The soldiers pulled her up, and she slumped again. When they tried to lift her again, she screamed and kicked" (2003, p.146).

The Taliban have declared not to give women even the most basic right that of health care. The only women's hospital in the city is in poor conditions and is insufficiently equipped with machinery. In addition, the scene portrays the devotions made by a mother. By allowing the operation to go forward without anesthesia, Laila subjects herself to violent pain and serious kind of risks. Yet she put her child before herself and does her best to tolerate the pain at hand. "Even the notion of hardship and sorrow somehow obscene, unimaginable" (p. 302). There is no refuge, no sanctuary in her life with Rasheed because of his scorn, "his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat. . . . Mariam saw clearly how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid. . . She lived in fear of his . . . volatile temperament, his . . . punches, slaps, [and] kicks (p. 89).

Stereotype Talibs were cruel and dissipated. However, the novel is written from a first person narrator's viewpoint. The writer paints a horrible picture of Taliban atrocities. *The Kite Runner's* ironic manifestation about the past, the novel's war-zone setting and the novel's tragic irony is associated with the ignorance of many of its characters. The sad irony is a medium for disclosing any truth, and it is also a series of rhetorical strategies to authenticate Hosseini's claim: "I've learned [how] the past claws it way out. In the aftermath of a disaster, whether it be natural or man-made--and the Taliban are a disaster, The Taliban have destroyed what heritage Afghans had" (p .187).

The thinking includes the historical fact of European colonial domination and imperialist exploitation. European scholars gaze upon the alien other. [Said \(1978\)](#) stated both the geographical regions are opposites. They found their civilization and culture very distant and uncivilized. Islam was called MUHAMMADISM because MUHAMMAD (S.A.W.W) was the originator of Islam. No Muslim did know this terminology, and Westerners found this term. They justify their biological superiority by following Darwin's theory. Orient's prejudice was very low, but westerner's prejudice against eastern countries was still very explicit.

Hosseini shows the nationalistic feelings in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, through the characters. Laila feels a nationalistic instinct to help her nation, but she suffered there the horror while Afghanistan's political miseries continued in reality, the time of the changing government of Afghanistan created problems for women. Hosseini described this situation in *The Kite Runner*, "In the end, the world always wins. That's just the way of things" (2003, p.99). Next he says, "life is a train; get on board" (2003, p. 185).

Hosseini shows patriarchal attitude in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, despite initially resenting Laila, "She becomes a friend and a doting alternative mother to her through the common hardship of being married to the abusive psychologically imposing Rasheed" (p. 14). These lines also serve as a promise that one day might come again in women's life to free them from the hardships.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a written account of political upset and the fearful charge it takes, as well as an examination of the limited role of women in Afghan society. As a medical doctor, he directly looks upon the destructions of the women's hospital. Due to Rasheed's rash or rough treatment, Mariam could not have conceived, and Laila gave a birth of a premature baby from immensely protective surroundings till the life ends her own motherly ambitions. On the opposite side, Jalil appears as the standard for legitimacy according to societal views. Yet, once he lets Mariam down and resultantly rejects her presence at his home, his legitimacy as a father is called into question. In addition, Jalil's relationship

with Nana and Mariam shows his shame of this second family.

Hosseini noticed that he concerns the novel as a mother-daughter story indifferent to, *The Kite Runner*, which he thought a, father-son tale. It used the familial corners, but its main focus is female characters and their most important role in Afghan society. When it was asked why he wrote this novel and why the main focus on two Afghan women, [Hosseini \(2008\)](#) answered to this question. When he wrote and completed the story of *The Kite Runner*, then after some time, he intended to write a story of Afghan women by pleasing the idea of writing. His first novel was about the story of male dominance. All the characters are male without perhaps for the Amir's wife, Soraya, Jamila, Sanaubar, and Farzana. It was an entire-sided body of Afghan society when he had not grasped on in *The Kite Runner* with a complete landscape then he felt filled with story ideas.

Men were indulged in homosexuality, but they implemented laws of Sharia upon women by force of Islamic fundamentalism. In Afghan society, the authentic motif also involves and contains judgment, superstition, and class construction. He shows it in *The Kite Runner* "It was that same year, in the middle of the summer, that a woman covered in a sky blue burqa knocked on the front gates one morning" (p. 114). He further states the situation through males, "He was screaming at her and cursing and saying the Ministry of Vice and Virtue does not allow women to speak loudly" (p. 117). These lines reveal the strengths and weaknesses of women characters which may reflect Afghan culture towards women.

The study further attempts to question the double colonization of women in Afghanistan. In this novel, the communists favored women's education, but the Taliban had banned this education. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* create a place for women in Afghan society, Hosseini pointing to a passage in which Mariam's mother states, "Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always, you remember that, Mariam" ([Hosseini, 2007, p. 17](#)). In the text, both Mariam and Laila are forced for accepting a marriage to Rasheed, who requires them to wear a burqa before it is

implemented by law by the Taliban, and then it becomes an increasingly abusive thing. The novel consistently shows the patriarchal despotism where women are agonizingly dependent on fathers, husbands, and especially sons, the bearing of male children being their sole path to social status. Women's identity is concealed in *The Kite Runner*, as Hosseini shows. They are not free in their choices. They have to cover their faces for their family's dignity and status. Sanaubar is forced to wear a burqa till the pain of death. For instance, "It was that same year, in the middle of the summer, that a woman covered in a sky blue burqa knocked on the front gates one morning" (2003, p. 114). Sanaubar does not want to wear a burqa, but she is forced to wear it.

Hosseini's women face ambivalent stance in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It is the ambivalent stance of Mariam that she is misunderstood by her family. She has limited skills in social activities and has a visible religious identity, and society was closed to her. She has marginal status. She is held to account for various acts of violence. She is at the sharp edge of despair. She has faith in Islam. She murders her husband, who is unforgiving, narrow-minded visional of Islam. She becomes a monster in the last time of her life. She is changed and modified into a girl of utterly heartbreaking. She is a subaltern who can speak despite of living in the third place of enunciation. Her action is clearly a reflection of the mirror through her empowering techniques that make her subaltern conditions more bearable. She also questions the patriarchy and Islam by allowing herself to go outside the home. The other female characters show great disempowerment and their subjugation to religion. They also faced eastern male chauvinism. "She gave herself over to the new life that awaited her in this city, a life with a father, with sisters and brothers, a life in which she would love and be loved back, without reservation or agenda, without shame" (2007, p. 29). She was misunderstood by her family members. She needs a life without shame which she was leading before with her parents, who restrained her illegal child. Now she wanted to be a legal child.

[Hosseini \(2003\)](#) shows an ambivalent stance in *The Kite Runner*. Soraya and her mother also demonstrate the difficult role women have in balancing the expectations of old world culture with

the new world in which they are living. There is ambiguity in the tenets of the culture. There is no clarity in culture transmitted by the elders to the young generations. "Amir elaborates males' dominant position over women. "He was screaming at her and cursing and saying the Ministry of vice and virtue does not allow women to speak loudly" (p. 117). The discourse of orientalism has the imperialist stance of language, which is the example of representing the powerful for the powerless.

Afghani immigrants' personal lives in America are discriminated on the basis of diasporic identity shown in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Hosseini takes us into the mundane yet necessary world of bureaucracy to show how international policies often compound people's experiences of trauma. [Hosseini \(2007\)](#) says, "This is Afghanistan we're talking about. Most people there don't have birth certificates" (p. 56). These lines from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* show the difficulties faced by immigrants to be settled in America that the Government of Afghanistan had not issued the people's birth certificates. They have no identities by birth.

For immigrants, life is sick, poor, and homeless this is very rare and uncommon that we see such type of violence and injustice. Deaths of accused adulterers in Ghazi stadium express what is going on in Afghanistan under the Taliban's rule the sad thing is that victims become accused or criminals. Hosseini takes us into the world yet the necessary world of bureaucracy to show how international policies after compound people's experiences of serious injury, Raymond Andrews is a carved figure of the inflamed tape that one finds throughout America, or any immigration policies Amir tells Raymond Andrews. Amir finds out that Andrews lost his daughter in a violent way. He is reminded that violence exists everywhere in the world, even in privileged societies and situations. It means to be a true victim of war.

A Thousand Splendid Suns by [Hosseini \(2007\)](#) mainly focuses on the following vision, the double colonization of women as subalterns, whether the subaltern is really dumb or it can speak. The veil as an item of injustice and the spirit of resisting Govt laws by force and springiness of the subaltern to become *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* delivers a heartbreaking portrayal of

the women characters, Nana and her daughter Mariam as well as Laila and her daughter Aziza with the central characters being Mariam and Laila, between whom conditions from a mother-daughter relationship a bonding which at last becomes a weapon to fight patriarchy.

Taliban have restricted education of girls. Aziza and the other children are educated in a secrete manner by Kaka Zaman. Mariam also takes revenge against her father Jalil Khan by folding over the exact scene prevailed in her house. Laila is repeatedly beaten by Taliban; still her mother's desire inspires her to go out alone to meet Aziza. The lowest form of humbleness is meted out to Laila. When a Talib after whipping says, "if I see you again, I'll beat you until your mother's milk leaks out of your bones" (p. 78).

Women are more burdened creature for patriarchy and male ascendancy has more domination over the lives of women. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* focuses on mothers and daughters and friendship between women. In the case of this novel, Mr. Hosseini quickly makes it clear that he intends to deal with the dilemma of a woman in Afghanistan. Rasheed forces Mariam to wear a burqa and treats her with ill-nature of appearance, contempt, endangering her to scorn a laughing stock, insults her like she was nothing but a house cat.

In *The Kite Runner*, [Hosseini \(2003\)](#) elevated the thought of women's future hope, "This woman, this mother, with her heartbreaking eager, crooked smile and the barely veiled hope in her eyes. Soraya wanted to liberate herself from the difficulties and agonies of social life. Soraya is happy about the coming Amir. "I'm happy you came, it means... the world to me" (p. 88). Amir and Soraya's traditional courtship creates a little Afghan retreat in the confusion of America, Men have choices of marriage but women have no choice. Soraya is subject to a sexual double standard. But once she is betrothed to Amir, her parents can stop worrying that no one will ever want to marry her. Amir envies Soraya for freeing herself from her guilt and for being a braver and better person than him. Her sin may be smaller than his, but she has the strength to admit to it at the risk of losing him.

Taliban saw Afghan's individuality in the favor of keeping up old and existing institutions as a

fundamentalist Islamic state. Hosseini tells about the Afghan's individuality how the Taliban's general notion is a version to spoil the look and form that make the borders for the freedom of people in the name of Islam. [Hosseini \(2008\)](#) London time interview about *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it is about one woman who had lost her family and another woman who never really had one to begin with.

[Hosseini \(2008\)](#) elucidated in London times interview on December 12, why he made the rights of females a central theme in his novel: "I don't want to sound self-important, but this is a vital issue for the future of Afghanistan if I exclude half the population from the advance of rebuilding the country, it does not stand for chance". Females are traditionally and especially the main part of the education system. But now we had a country where the 80% females are illiterate. Hosseini shows the traditions of Afghan society like that the usage of burqa, while visibly strain to patronize women and instead the females can be used to control and overpower.

Nana's stress on Mariam learning to bear suffering not only suggests how inhabited Mariam's future will be, but also the type of lessons that Mariam must have learned as a child in Nana's home. Mariam's capacity for lastingness is what allows her to survive dreadful conditions and depressing personal losses. She is thrust into adulthood in an immediate manner with her requirement for a new house. Shame is searched out through Jalil as he casts Mariam out of his house during the darkest point in her life. He not only sends Mariam out of his house, but also sends her to a whole new city, which allows Mariam symbolically to disconnect from him.

[Hosseini \(2003\)](#) shows the women have no individual selves in *The Kite Runner*; Soraya and her mother also reveal the hard and difficult role of women, which have steady assumptions of an old-world culture with the new world in which they are living. The women have no rights for themselves. They have no choice of marriage. "Fathers and sons could talk freely about women. But no Afghan girl--no decent and mohtaram Afghan girl, at least--queried her father about a young man" (p. 79).

[Hosseini \(2007\)](#) showed strange reality in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam leaves her father's

house; she loses everything, including her mother and her childhood. She is expelled from her childhood home and Herat altogether, and she is forced into a marriage with an unknown man from Kabul, but, just as the burqa gives her a sense of asylum. As time passes and Mariam is unsuccessful in bearing children, she finds that Rasheed's affection turns to indifference and hostility. Some strange decision came into being. Mariam shoot her husband by his gun and liberate herself from the tyranny of her husband.

In this chapter, post-colonial elements have been discussed by analyzing it through Edward Said (1978) and Gayatri Spivak (1988). These elements show the basic Othering differences found in Afghan Country. Edward Said and Spivak set out to negate these differences. They stated that the people of these countries are equal. There is no binary opposition between British and Afghan society.

Conclusion

The study was intended to explore othering of women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* which depict Afghan society. As it is the big issue in Afghanistan, so analysis was made to overcome these hurdles of othering phenomenon. It was revealed that system of internal male culture at homes and external discrimination at Government level were the most significant evidences of the othering.

It is indicated that women were significantly marginalized in their homes. They were beaten by Taliban by going alone through the streets on the name of Islam. They were also exploited by Russians in their regime. It was found that different attitudes affect women's life. The interaction between male and female was found significant. It was discovered that patriarchal effect was unbearable for females. Men were likely to have the heads of women, and they were the bread winners for their families.

Recommendations

In this last part of the chapter, recommendations to improve the prevailing situation, relevant policy development and implementation are given.

To reduce the othering of women, the policies should be developed for controlling the unchecked

provision of male culture by making strict laws for the rights of women. Taliban Govt, militarization and superficial discrimination present at homes and at workplaces. Hence, both males and females may be privileged from the equal rights. Women should make their voice and maintain their position in society. Solid efforts should be made at every level to eliminate injustice from their society socially and culturally of participation and maximum contribution in order to achieve the goal.

In fact, Cultural Othering has offered solutions to many postcolonial problems like transmuting time to space, with the present struggling by forgetting the past to construct the future and empowering the subjects to make their way. The postcolonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Yet, if hastily cultivated, it can lead to threats

and dangers. At the same time, the commentator should be careful enough while commenting upon religious associations of others. The way powerful hurt the powerless bypassing disrespectful remarks about Islam cannot be taken like embellishment of empowerment, therefore, cannot be recommended on the context of othering. The postcolonial contact zone must remain flexible if our objective is to make active mobility and integration non troublesome and traumatic. Belonging does not come at the rate of isolation. Negotiating modernity should not imply a loss of fundamental values. Future research should be done on othering issues like hybridity, mimicry, liminality, uncanny, history and other diasporic issues of post-colonialism to reduce the marginality of women. These issues have dire importance to work on them in order to bring awareness among societies for the bright future of women in an Islamic country like Afghanistan.

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