

# THE SUBALTERN VOICE IN A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

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## ABSTRACT

*Life in Afghanistan puts female as the second sex and the victims in the culture of patriarchy. In the eye of Orientalism, women are the east. Thus, they can be colonized and suppressed (the subaltern). This study was designed to answer the question how the voice of the subaltern represented by the characters in the novel A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Khosseini. Library research was applied in this study. Data were analyzed using postcolonial theory, specifically from Gayatri Spivak. The conclusion presents that both characters, Mariam and Laila, are the representations of the subaltern who created voice to fight against the oppression. Between Mariam, the symbol of traditional woman, and Laila, the symbol of modern woman, only Laila survives. However, it is impossible for Laila to achieve it without the courage and sacrifice of Mariam.*

**Keywords:** postcolonial, subaltern, A Thousands Splendid Suns, patria

## ABSTRAK

*Wacana kehidupan di Afghanistan menempatkan perempuan sebagai “jenis kelamin kedua” dan cenderung menjadikan mereka sebagai korban budaya patriarkat. Hal ini dapat diidentikkan dengan Orientalisme yang memandang Timur (perempuan) sebagai “yang lain” yang boleh dijajah dan ditindas. Kajian ini menjawab pertanyaan bagaimana suara dari kelompok subaltern direpresentasikan para tokoh utama di novel A Thousand Splendid Suns karya Khaled Khosseini. Data dikaji dengan teori poskolonial dari Gayatri Spivak. Simpulan menyatakan bahwa tokoh Mariam dan Laila merupakan representasi subaltern di Afghanistan yang berjuang melawan penindasan. Antara Mariam yang merupakan simbol perempuan tradisional dan Laila yang merupakan simbol perempuan modern. Hanya Laila yang akhirnya berhasil bebas dari penindasan. Kendati demikian, kebebasan Laila sebagai subaltern dicapai dengan keberanian sekaligus pengorbanan Mariam.*

**Kata kunci:** poskolonial, subaltern, A Thousands Splendid Suns

## INTRODUCTION

Community system puts the relationship of women and men manifested in various forms and patterns of behavior that reflects the acceptance of the women and men in the position of each gender. Some people recognize equal rights for women and men but more people put the position of men higher than women. This can be seen by the socio-cultural realities in many places dominated by the ideology of patriarchy.

Hearty (2011) explains that this ideological idea believes that men are superior beings who master and define the social structure, economy, culture and politics in the male perspective. Women are placed in domestic areas in a form of restriction, exclusion and excision of women. In other words, the position of men is structurally higher than women. Furthermore, referring to Sugihastuti (2007) the cultural construction in community also contributes in promoting it. Men's status that is considered to be higher makes them have the power to control women in various ways, such as reproduction, sexuality, division of labor system, etc.

In the community that still holds the traditional understanding (patriarchy), women are on the weaker side. They always accept injustice and oppression. Women do not acquire their rights, both in community and in the family. The opposite is earned by men. In other words, women in many cultural groups are placed as inferior. For example, only men can be leaders or only men can have high education.

Basically, interpretation highly depends on the will of the interpreter (male). If the interpreter (in government or religion) is a group that puts women in a noble position, behavioral culture of the community will reflect the nobility. However, if the interpreter considers women as inferior, then the discourse can be used as a foundation for them to put women in oppression. In such setting, women are often positioned as members of oppressed group and women do not have right to speak significantly. Women are placed in a weak position resulting in a sense that women should meet the needs of men.

In a country where a community is dominated by a religion, religious ritual discourse is also derived from the process of interpretation by a group that dominates. It happens in countries like Afghanistan who embrace hard-line Islam. In such places, the religious discourse is interpreted blindly that makes the position and the choice of woman limited. Thus, men have more power and more access than women.

Spivak (1988) said that women are often positioned as the lower – and in fact this lies in a religious discourse, especially in the countries/groups that apply strong religious ideology. With an open and contextual interpretation of what is contained in the teachings of religion, religion actually has a great passion and sensitivity in gender equity. The interpretation will be the basis of the establishment and understanding of an ideology.

Ideology is a human conception and it becomes a kind of principle to practical action. In fact, qualitatively, ideology provides a unique identity within a social group. Ideology is the logic of ideas that indicates a group, which holds the ideology, perceives and understands the world

in a certain way that is consistent (Thwaites & Mules, 2002). In other words, the ideology becomes a kind of basic element to live a life consistent with the principle since ideology affects one's worldview or group to create their world.

This relationship leads to domination and subordination. Thus, it causes unpleasant picture about the oppressed. In postcolonial theory, it's called the "east" or the other. The oppressed group is called subaltern which do not have a voice. Subaltern literally is interpreted as lower ranking (oppressed). This group is described as weak, ignorant, barbaric, uncivilized, strange, mystical, different and irrational.

Domination and subordination is a relationship that does not only occur between countries or ethnic but also within a country or within a particular ethnicity. Emphasis on ethnicity in the literature of postcolonial theory can cover a wide range of gender power relations, for example, the image of women as bearers of significant tasks to maintain the sanctity and reproduction. Furthermore, women bear a double burden due to being oppressed by authority powers and subordinated by men.

This portrait is seen on the novel of Khaled Khosseini, a UNHCR doctor who was born and raised in Afghanistan before becoming a US citizen. The setting is in Afghanistan, which is one of the third world countries which upholds patriarchal values in Islam extremists. For thirty years, successive colonial powers controlled Afghanistan. Starting from the invasion of the Soviet Union and then proceed with the seizure of power by civil war between ethnic groups, such as Najibullah, Mujahideen, Taliban, and the last is the control of the United States who wants to capture Osama bin Laden. In a situation as a colonized country, women in Afghanistan are also affected, either directly or indirectly. This situation becomes background in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. This novel tells the story of two women from different generations, Mariam and Laila.

Mariam lives with her mother, Nana, in a hut away from the city. Mariam is a girl who always receives different versions of history about herself and her origins. Nana (Mariam's mother) is a housekeeper in the house of Jalil Khan's family. She is impregnated by Jalil. Although customs in Afghanistan allow men to marry multiple wives under the same roof, Jalil chooses not to formalize his relationship with Nana. This makes Nana always talk about Jalil in a negative tone to Mariam. Nana also repeatedly gives the idea that women are only objects of power for men and the only thing that should always be owned by women is *tahamul* or survival.

However, Jalil always comes to visit Mariam. Even though Nana tells all that is bad about Jalil to Mariam, she still adores her father who always visits her every Thursday. Mariam always wants to visit Jalil's house and meets with other families in Herat. The desire grows bigger when she celebrates fifteenth birthday. She is even willing to ignore the ban that is put on her. She takes a long journey to Herat alone. However, the bitterness received from Jalil's family in Herat makes her understand the words of her mother. Mariam's visit to the residence of Jalil makes Nana devastated. Nana feels that everyone has ignored her. When Mariam returns to her cabin, she finds

her mother's lifeless body. Nana chooses to hang herself since her daughter would prefer to see Jalil.

Mariam's suffer continues. Without the presence of her mother, she is taken and raised by Jalil. However Jalil's family dislike her presence. She is forced to marry an old widower who is always rough. After marriage, Mariam is taken to Kabul. Mariam's husband, Rasheed, treats her as a wife in a sense of a lust satisfaction, housekeeper, and an object of domestic violence. Rasheed only wants to have a son. Therefore, he is only kind when Mariam is pregnant. When Mariam miscarriages, his attitude then turns back into temperamental.

Laila is described as a young woman, smart, modern and well educated. Laila's family is a forward-thinking family. Laila's father, Hakim, is a teacher with a broaden mind. Laila also has a limp male friend named Tariq. Laila and Tariq have intimate romance.

The transition from the reign of the Soviet Union into a civil war between the Mujahideen and Najibullah in Afghanistan raises many families to flee. Laila's family is killed by a rocket that destroys her house. Fortunately, Laila is only wounded. Later, Laila hear that Tariq dies. At the age of fifteen, Laila loses those she loves. Laila's feeling is crushed.

Laila's and Rasheed's family lives as neighbors even though they do not have a good relationship. Seeing the suffering of the young Laila, Rasheed looks at other opportunity. Rasheed pretends to be sympathetic to bring Laila to be treated at home and trick her so she is willing to get marry with him. When Laila knows she is pregnant, Laila has to accept Rasheed's proposal.

After married to Rasheed, Laila and Mariam live in the same house. At the beginning, Mariam hates Laila since she thinks that Laila is ungrateful because Laila takes Rasheed from her. Mariam is not willing to share Rasheed with another woman. She feels that she has done everything for Rasheed.

At the beginning, Rasheed treats Laila like a queen because Laila is young and being pregnant. Rasheed is expecting a boy. But when the baby daughter is born (Aziza), Rasheed turns into rough, especially when he suspects that Aziza is not his daughter. Laila always has courage to argue with Rasheed. However, when Laila argues, Rasheed then vent his anger on Mariam, this makes Laila decide not to fight Rasheed anymore because of her sympathy to Mariam.

The civil war makes their economic life difficult. As the economy worsens, Rasheed's attitude becomes increasingly temperamental. On the other hand, it turns out that Tariq is still alive. Tariq returns to Kabul and seeks Laila. Rasheed is so furious to know about it and he tortures Laila to near death. Mariam who could not stand anymore to Rasheed's attitude finally determines to kill him. Mariam finally is sentenced to death for the sake of Laila's and her family's freedom.

This story of the Afghanistan women struggling for their voice is written by a man whose root is also Afghani who has the experience of witnessing the life there. Thus, it's interesting to analyze a struggle story of women's oppression from the point of view of a man and how he created a voice for the women as the subaltern. This analysis will show a method to identify the subaltern voice

so that it can be applied for any research postcolonial approach. Therefore, this study will attempt to answer the question how the voice of the subaltern groups is represented by the main character in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Khosseini.

## METHOD

This research was done by focusing the literary text and it's relationship with the reality because what is expressed in the novel is a reflection of women's life in a colonized country. The method of the research is content analysis. Content analysis method has functions to identify the content (of the novel) and characteristics of the writer.

With the setting of the story which is full of oppression. The discourse of oppressor and oppressed group seemed very clear in the analysis using post-colonial approach. According to Endraswara (2008), the construction of the oppressor and the oppressed is always about subordination. Oppressor is always depicted in the subject position, arrogant, superior, winner, and dominated. The relationship between the oppressor-oppressed or "east"- "west"/ the self -the other is a hegemonic relationship. Oppressor/"west"/the self is always positioned as superior, while the oppressed/"east"/the other is always positioned as inferior (Gandhi, 2001).

The analysis of research was conducted using the postcolonialism theory of Gayatri Spivak. Postcolonial theory and feminism reject the binary opposition against the patriarchal/colonialism authority constructs. The postcolonial feminism theorists have provided a strong reason that the central issue of racial politics has sunk double colonization of women under imperialist rule. The theory formulates that the third world women are victims of *par excellence* or forgotten victims of two ideologies: imperialism and patriarchy. Spivak as cited in Gandhi (2001) states:

"Between patriarchy and imperialism, constitutional subject and formation object, the image of women disappears not into a pure nonexistence but into a coil that describes the third world women who are in between of tradition and modernization."

Referring to Spivak, literary studies of colonialism relate to the issue of subaltern studies or studies of encouraging oppressed people to talk and stage over their silence. The term of "subaltern" is derived from the Latin. The prefix sub- means "under" and alter or *alternus* means "the other". *Subalternus* refers to the lower class individuals (inferior) (Silima, 2013). Subaltern itself is a term originally used by Antonio Gramsci in the year 1929-1935. In Gramsci's view, subaltern group refers to a person or group of lower class in certain societies. The person or group is suffering under the domination of hegemony run by an elite group. This makes this group do not get the same rights as other citizens to participate in the historical and cultural participation (Louai, 2012).

Spivak (1988) says the concept of subaltern becomes more complex in her writings of postcolonial feminist critique of American Indians. What is meant by Spivak is subaltern women in various colonial context has

no conceptual language to talk because there is no ears of men to listen. This does not mean that women cannot communicate literally, but there is no subject position in the colonial discourse that allows women to articulate themselves as a person. According to Spivak, the subaltern women are more susceptible to pressure than subaltern men (Silima, 2013) because as the second sex (second group of men), women are destined to be silent.

One of common terms that refer to subaltern in this literature for colonialism is “the other” and the opposition of this term is “the self”. Another common term is “west” and “east”. “West” is for a group of superior and “east” is for a group of inferior. As a superior group, the “west” or the oppressors will dominate and suppress the “east” or subaltern groups. In facing the pressure from the “west”, subaltern groups or the “east” can keep voiceless or express their voice (Choudury, 2013)..

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This novel depicts two female figures of different generations: Mariam and Laila. Mariam is described as a figure representing traditional generation. She is uneducated and always dominated. She is dominated by the male figures in her life, from her father to her husband. Mariam’s mother taught her to always survive (*tahamul*) in receiving such dominance. Laila, on the other hand, is an image of a young woman who is smart and modern. As the daughter of a teacher who has a modern thought, Laila has a happy childhood, a life of freedom and modern education. Mariam and Laila are brought together by fate as the wives of a cruel man named Rasheed. Rasheed is a figure of a man who regards women as inferior.

Oppression to Mariam and Laila in domestic areas still has to be coupled with the condition of Afghanistan that experiences a variety of power transition. As women who experience multiple oppressions from the authority and their husband, these women decide to voice their opposition.

In this novel, the women are the ones who are oppressed. In the domestic life of Mariam, Laila and Rasheed, Rasheed is the superior or the “west”. As inferior in life along with Rasheed for years, Mariam’s and Laila’s voice are silenced. This does not mean that they do not attempt to escape and voice their desire. Various things have been done by Mariam and Laila in an attempt to escape from the pressures. Mariam and Laila are suffered by oppression inside and outside their house because of the interpretation of the socio-cultural ideology dominated by men in Afghanistan.

Based on the analysis of the content using postcolonial approach by Gayatri Spivak, Mariam and Laila are women who in the novel are positioned as the “east”. “East” is inferior, weak, stupid, and irrational. As wives, they are a marginalized group. Their husbands, Rasheed, is positioned as “west” or oppressor of their lives. Mariam and Laila are subalterns who could not talk. They want to express their desires, hopes, as well as protests. However, they do not have courage because there is no ear of men who are willing to hear. It’s the result of the ideology of patriarchy, feudalism, and authoritarianism.

“East” is a weak creature. She could not fight

against the strong “west”. Similarly, Mariam and Laila are representations of the “east”. Rasheed is a representation of the “west” that can suppress and oppress “east”. After knowing that Mariam is deliberately removed by the family of his father and Laila loses all beloved ones because of war, Rasheed acts arbitrarily in Mariam and Laila on behalf of the husband’s role in the household. Laila’s and Mariam’s position as a subaltern deals with Rasheed’s arrogance. Below is the depiction of two female figures in the novel.

### Mariam

Mariam is a witness of the rigid of Afghani patriarchy system. She is the witness of a child born outside marriage (*harami*) simply because her father cannot marry her mother who is a housekeeper. In Islamic rule that is adopted by most Afghans, a man is allowed to have polygamy. However, in this case, her father chooses not to marry her mother on the reason that Nana is the one who (Mother Mary) approaches and teases him. Men have more right to choose who would become his wife, but women cannot demand their rights. As a child, Mariam just wants to get together with Jalil’s family, but Jalil lets her down just because of fear of embarrassment.

This is also makes Mariam aware of her mother’s warning about men, like the phrase, “Remember this now and keep remember, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, the index finger of man is also always stretched to accuse women. Always. Remember this, Mariam.” [20], “Men’s heart is very different from mother’s womb, Mariam. Womb will not bleed or stretched because they have to take you in. “She also reminds Mariam that,” women like us suffer ... How can we bear all our burdens in silence.” [118]

After the death of her mother, Mariam feels the bitterness of her life as a woman who is alone living her life. As a girl, she is forced to marry Rasheed in order not to become a burden of her father. Mariam feels that she is a shame for the father. Then, as a wife, she is just a housekeeper and sexual object to her husband and his intention for having a baby son.

When she knows that she is pregnant, Mariam feels like having the most beautiful grace. However, when the baby miscarriages, she feels that it is a punishment to her for having left her mother and chosen to live with her father who does not want her. Deep in her heart, Mariam blames Rasheed, herself, even God as He makes fun of her. However, as a woman who grows up traditionally with Islamic teachings, Mariam also asks forgiveness to God. With painful feelings, Mariam buries the fetus of her own baby since Rasheed prefers to listen to the radio instead.

Mariam also accepts the harsh reality of not being able to give a child. She has always been the target of Rasheed’s anger either verbally or physically, ranging from large to small things. In fact, Mariam has to lose her teeth simply because Rasheed do not like rice she cooked. Rasheed takes the gravel and forces Mariam to eat the gravel.

Mariam realizes that she lives in fear with Rasheed “It is not easy for Mariam to tolerate Rasheed’s attitude, from his screaming voice, mockery.... Mariam sees clearly

how much tolerance of a woman who is frightened. And Mariam is indeed frightened.” [126–127] However, as a subaltern, Mariam can only accept her husband’s oppression alone without being able to speak or even protest. Mariam knows that she is a burden to Rasheed. Her mother’s warnings about the suffering of women’s over men seemed to have made Mariam ready to accept it as natural situation.

However, Mariam’s silence changes since Rasheed expresses a desire to marry again. Rasheed argues that he wants to protect Laila, who is all alone. Rasheed says he could have let Laila away but it will only make Laila become the targets of a brothel or bandit. Seeing that, Mariam protests to Rasheed. Although polygamy is a common practice in Afghanistan, Mariam who is usually silent cannot accept it. “I ... do not want it” ... “You have many years makes me as a first wife (*Ambagh*)” ... “I do not allow it.” [262–263]

This illustrates that Mariam would like to express desires, hopes, as well as a protest. However, she does not have the courage for it, because there is no ear of men, in this case Rasheed, who is willing to listen. This makes Mariam as subaltern that is only able to silence the dissent.

After so many years living in the household oppression, Mariam, as subaltern begins to speak when her family (which, though not a perfect one) is disturbed by others. Mariam is not willing to become the first wife because she feels that Laila comes to steal her husband as the only family she has. Mariam has lost a mother, been discarded by her father, and lost prospective baby. She does not want to lose her husband too. Mariam tells Laila that although Rasheed treats Laila like a queen (*malika*) and her as a village woman (*dehati*), she is not willing to let her husband stolen and she will not let Laila cast her out of her house and make her the housekeeper in her own house. Later, she chooses to accept the situation since she would not be able to let another woman (Laila) become the target of oppression.

The relationship between Mariam and Laila, which is at the beginning filled with suspicion, is growing well after seeing how Laila takes care the new-born baby shortly after Laila and Rasheed married. Mariam feels being loved unconditionally by Laila and her daughter. It moves her, “No one ever wants Mariam in such a way before. Love never approaches her unconditionally, unreservedly.” [308]. Mariam and Laila mutually protect and defend one to another, especially from Rasheed’s oppression. There is a relationship of sisterhood that is created between them since they are both oppressed by Rasheed and equally suffered from Taliban.

To deal with Rasheed, Mariam learns a lot from Laila. When Rasheed gets angry about Tariq and Laila’s meeting, Rasheed tortures and strangles Laila to the point of death. Seeing this, Mariam’s courage emerges. Mariam regrets and feels stupid to marry Rasheed. She feels all of her effort is not worth it to get Rasheed as a husband. At that moment, Mariam swings a shovel that is taken from the warehouse and Rasheed is silenced forever. “Rasheed will kill her (Laila) ... she thought. Mariam could not let that happen. Rasheed has taken so many things from Mariam’s lives in twenty-seven years of their marriage. Mariam never wants to watch Rasheed claims the life of

Laila ... Mariam swings the shovel in her hand ... Mariam swings it high ... high until it touches the tip of his back ... while doing so, Mariam thinks that this is the first time she decides her own destiny” [428–430]

Subaltern, who has long been unable to speak, finally takes the extreme attitude that destroys oppression and sets the liberation of herself and of her families (Laila and her children) forever. Finally, the subaltern speaks loudly and firmly.

After the killing, Mariam arranges Laila and her family to leave Afghanistan. She is the one who would face sentence for taking the life of Rasheed’s. In prison, Mariam is admired by other woman inmates since only Mariam is sentenced to jail for killing her husband. The other inmates are women who leave their husbands or fathers.

This illustrates that women in Afghanistan in general are subaltern with a very weak position because they are oppressed and unable to express their wishes. They prefer to live within the confines of the prison. At least, a prison with bars provides a better life than a prison without bars in their homes. Mariam, for her inmates, is the picture of courage that they deserve to be able to remove the oppression and suppression on their fate as a woman.

In the end, Mariam does have to pay for her freedom from Rasheed with the death penalty. Mariam does not regret it because she knows that she is not happy of being born into her subaltern world but she is happy to know that her life will end up as someone who is loved by many people. “She leaves this world as a friend, as a sister, a protector, a mother. Someone that is meaningful. No. It is not a bad thing. This is a legitimate end of a life that began with contempt.” [456]

Mariam is a woman who has the patience and strength in dealing with something that happens to her. When an expression of love received, she even dares to take extraordinary action. All of her life, she just expects to be loved and to live in a family. For the sake of her family and her loved ones, she dares to fight for freedom. Indeed, the subaltern is a marginalized group but love gives them the strength to finally able to speak.

### **Laila**

Originating from different generations with Mariam, Laila is a symbol of female figure with a background of modern education since her father is a former teacher. Laila is a beautiful and smart woman. She has a friend who later becomes her lover, Tariq. Laila uses to express what she feels to her father and Tariq. Laila is caught in a situation that her family is killed, Tariq reportedly dies and she is having Tariq’s baby in her pregnancy. Therefore, Laila reluctantly accepts Rasheed’s marriage proposal. In fact, Laila asks Rasheed to have their wedding held as soon as possible. Although Laila realizes that she would hurt Mariam by doing this. This is done to trick Rasheed so that he does not suspect that Laila is already pregnant before their marriage.

In their wedding night, Laila fools Rasheed by wounding her finger and shedding a little blood so that Rasheed would assume she is a virgin. “Rasheed looks awkward. Her fingers struggles endlessly to open his own

shirt .... Through chattering teeth, Laila asks Rasheed to turn off the lights. In silence, after feeling Rasheed is asleep, Laila reaches under the bed and pulls out a knife .. With the knife, she cuts the tip of her finger and let her blood drips on the sheets where they sleep together.” [269]

It shows that Laila is an astute depiction of women in overcoming a problem. At this point, Laila has not become a subaltern yet. Laila is still ruled over Rasheed and his male lust that is swelled at the sight of a young and beautiful woman. Laila is the queen for Rasheed. Rasheed tries to make Laila impressed with his good attitude. Under the influence of his male lust, Rasheed does not realize that she has been oppressed by Laila’s untruth.

On the other hand, Laila does not feel comfortable with the marriage because she feels guilty to Mariam. She rejects the wedding ring that is given by Rasheed since it is purchased by mortgaging Mariam’s wedding ring. Laila repeatedly apologizes to Mariam. However, it is impossible for her to tell Mariam the truth.

When Laila gives birth to a daughter (Aziza), Rasheed’s attitude changes drastically. Laila’s position turns into “east”, which is oppressed by Rasheed’s roughness. However, Laila grows up in the family of free-minded and modern, so that Laila has the courage to fight Rasheed back. Laila is a subaltern who dares to speak. Resistance that is performed by Laila makes Rasheed always impose his frustration at Mariam because Mariam is a traditional figure who is always silent in receiving Rasheed’s abusive attitude. “Usually their fight (Laila and Rasheed) will stop by itself after a few minutes, but half an hour passed ... the fight is even more heated.” Mariam could hear the loud noise of Rasheed’s. Her tone (Laila), no less loud than him, it sounds firm and not wants to be outdone. The next day ... Rasheed bursts into Mariam’s room ‘She defies me. Surely it is you who teach her ‘.’” [293–294].

Laila knows that Rasheed makes Mariam as a target of his anger and this is what makes Laila reduces her resistance. “I give up ... I gave up. Do not do this anymore. Please, Rasheed. Do not beat her!” [294]. Laila does not bear to see Mariam become a victim for her sisterhood solidarity. Laila sees that they both face the same oppressor, namely Rasheed. For the sake of Mariam, Laila restrains and starts to become a subaltern group who is not able to speak.

Laila does not like violence since she is not familiar with it. Although her parents are obviously more fond of her brothers, Laila still gets outpouring of affection from her parents, “I cannot leave just like that .. I grow up in a house that no one has ever done something (violence) like that.” [305]. The frontal resistance of Laila’s on Rasheed is making Mariam at risk of being tortured. Therefore, Laila intends to escape from Rasheed for her freedom. Every day, little by little, Laila steals money from Rasheed for funding her refuge with Mariam and Aziza.

This plan fails because of the customs and ruling power of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan women are not allowed to go outside without the company of her husband and women also have to wear a burka. This makes Laila have to ask for help to a man to accompany them and recognize them as relatives. Unfortunately, the man does not keep his promise and prefers to report Laila, Mariam,

and Aziza to the Taliban (Taliban police). Subsequently they are arrested, returned to the house, and they become the subject of Rasheed’s anger.

Later, Rasheed also deliberately does not want to accompany Laila to visit Aziza who is put in the orphanage. Rasheed deliberately does this so that Laila would be arrested and sentenced by the Taliban for going outside the house unaccompanied by her husband. Although Laila is in the position of being oppressed, Laila always loves her children without fear of being arrested, sentenced, or tortured by Rasheed or the Taliban.

The torture is not as heavy as Laila’s dilemma when she finds out that she is pregnant Rasheed’s child, a child of the man who oppresses her life. Laila ever thinks to have an abortion. However, her maternal instincts and hatred of war makes her discouraged. “Clutched in the hands of Laila’s is the blade spokes of a bicycle, which she cuts with pliers from a scrap tires... Laila has been so long lying on the floor, breathing air between her teeth, her legs spread... A very bad thing, thought Laila, now, a mother experiences fear of not to be able to bring love to their own children. It is strange... Laila wonders whether she would be able to love a Rasheed’s child just as she loves Tariq’s child. In the end, Laila could not do it... Laila discouraged because she could not accept the opinion of the Mujahideen: that sometimes, in times of war, it is allowed if the lives of innocent people have to die. Laila was fighting against Rasheed. Babies in the womb are innocent... Laila has watched enough of an innocent man killed in a crossfire.” [348] Although her life is oppressed and her hatred at Rasheed grows bigger, she would not have a heart to kill Rasheed’s child. A mother’s love is more important than hatred and violence.

After Zalmi (Rasheed’s son) is born, the situation is not getting better. Rasheed spoils the boy. It makes their economic situation worse. Besides, the economic condition makes the women in the house turn into a target of Rasheed’s anger. Not only violence, Mariam’s and Laila’s treasure in the house are also sold by Rasheed. Laila and Mariam are facing double oppression, directly from their husbands Rasheed and indirectly from economic conditions caused by the conditions of war.

The condition of being oppressed is finally ended when Tariq comes for Laila. By killing Rasheed, Mariam has freed Laila and her family from the cruelty of Rasheed’s. Together with Tariq, Laila and her family then flee to Pakistan and live happily until the war is over. However, happiness is not obtained easily and freely. There are love and sacrifice made by Laila and Mariam who are not able to accept the cruelty that always threatens to kill them.

In Pakistan Laila and Aziza often dream and recall memories in Afghanistan. Laila often feels uneasy. Laila often remembers the time when she is still together with Mariam and remembers her father’s words that no matter how bad Afghanistan is, it is her country. “You can be anything you want Laila... When this war is finished, Afghanistan needs you” [475].

However, the fond memories left behind in Afghanistan and love for the homeland make Laila and Tariq take their family back to Afghanistan and make a campaign for the education there.

Mariam as a symbol of the traditional woman and Laila as a symbol of the modern woman are the subaltern or “east” of men in Afghanistan. Their oppressed experience is still complicated by economic pressures and customs applied in Afghanistan. Mariam and Laila are just silent and they accept oppression because of the love they have on their lives and families. However, for the sake of the beloved people, they are willing to fight and even destroy oppression. In general, subaltern groups could not speak their voices, but there will always be forces that would make them able to speak loudly and firmly, namely: the power of love.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions that can be drawn from this novel study are as follows. First, women are positioned as weak, ignorant, and irrational. Men and culture have put them into a subaltern with their voice silenced. No subject positions allow women to articulate themselves personally and no ears of men that would listen to them. However, if there is a strong force arises within them, they are able to articulate and even destroy the oppressor.

Second, the story in this novel also implies that modernity could not be achieved without compromising traditional values. Mariam is a symbol of women with traditional values, while Laila is a symbol of women with modern values. Mariam sacrifices herself for the sake of Laila’s freedom.

Third, men do not always become the dominant group. If men have been overpowered by his lust, male would be controlled by women. Actually, it is not the strength of women that control men but the lust of men imprisons their minds, so that they do not realize when they are being fooled.

Fourth, women should seek their own efforts to improve their lives, which was oppressed by the hegemony of the male and rulers. Regardless of who the rulers in Afghanistan are, women are part of the people who get the double impact of colonization, that is, from the men and the rulers who are always getting more special rights than women. Oppression that is felt by women under the regime or closed society is also a crime against humanity.

Fifth, the main characters in this novel are described as characters who struggle to achieve freedom and find love. Mariam who is long-suffering, loneliness, alone, and depressed becomes bolder after knowing Laila. Mariam becomes stronger as she gets the love of Laila which she considers as her own child.

This research may be just identify the representation of the women as subaltern voice from a novel written by a man. To have a thorough picture of a man depicting the subaltern voice of women, further research on other novels with the same background of writer can be applied.

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