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The Representation of Muslim Community in Khaled Hosseini's Novels

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to explore the representation of Muslim community and its relation with the West in Khaled Hosseini's Novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Khaled Hosseini's novels offer a profound portrayal of Afghan society and the Muslim community challenging the dominant global narratives that often reduce Islam to stereotypes. It argues that Hosseini portrays Muslim society as internally diverse, ethically complex, and historically shaped by war, patriarchy and displacement. It discusses the stereotypical construction of the Muslim community and the consequent deviation from Islamic principles, particularly in relation to patriarchal authority and the politicization of religion under the regimes such as Taliban. At the same time this paper investigates the subjugated lives of women focusing on and understanding the misogynistic attempts that marginalize women in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. This study also investigates the representation of Islamic Diaspora that highlights how migration and displacement transform Muslim identity into a hybrid across cultural boundaries. Ultimately, this study concludes that Hosseini's fiction contributes to a more nuanced, empathetic, and critically informed understanding of the Muslim community in contemporary world literature.

Keywords: Muslim community, Khaled Hosseini, Afghan, Identity, Diaspora.

Introduction:

Afghanistan is a Muslim country and 84% of its population comprises of Sunni Muslims. Among them 50% of men are illiterate and 79% of women. Afghanistan is divided into 20 different ethnic groups, which is further divided into two tribes. As the subject country of this study is Afghanistan and Islam is the most dominant religion in Afghanistan. In many global narratives Islam has been portrayed through a narrow lens that associates it with extremism, violence, and social repression. In this context the novels of Khaled Hosseini offer an important literary intervention. His works provide a deeply humanized portrayal of Afghan Muslim life, focusing on personal relationships, ethical dilemmas, and socio-political transformation. Rather than presenting Islam as a static or homogeneous entity, Hosseini depicts it as a lived cultural and moral framework that shapes individual and common identities. This research paper examines the representation of Muslim community in two major novels by Khaled Hosseini through four interrelated analytical dimensions, stereotype, deviation, diaspora, and stigma. In doing so, his works not only enrich contemporary literary discourse but also provide a more deeper and informed engagement with the realities of Muslim life in a globalized world.

Literature Review:

Scholarly engagement with the work's of Khaled Hosseini has largely focused on the themes such as trauma, exile, gender oppression, and memory. Critics have examined *The Kite Runner* as a narrative of guilt and redemption, emphasizing the psychological dimensions of Amir's character and the broader implications of personal betrayal.

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Similarly *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has received attention for its portrayal of female suffering, resilience, and resistance under patriarchal condition. Studies often highlights Hosseini's depiction of diaspora and displacement, particularly in the context of Afghan migration to Western countries. However, scholars has paid relatively limited attention to the representation of Muslim community as a socio-cultural and ethnic entity. Many criticism treat Islam as a background element rather than a central framework. Moreover while some studies address issues of gender and power, fewer examine how these issues intersect with religious interpretation, stereotype, stigma, and internal deviation within Muslim societies. This research seeks to fill this gap by focusing specially on how Hosseini constructs the Muslim community in his novels, not as a monolithic or static entity, but as a dynamic and diverse formation.

Objectives of the study:

This study employees the qualitative textual analysis approach focusing on close reading of Khaled Hosseini's work. The primary objective of this research is to analyze the representation of Muslim community in Khaled Hosseini's novels with particular emphasis on religion, culture, and socio-political context.

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the presence and deconstruction of stereotypes associated with Islam.
2. To explore the theme of deviation, focusing on how Islamic teachings are misinterpreted or manipulated within patriarchal framework.
3. To study the representation of diaspora and it's impact on Muslim identity, highlighting the formation of hybrid identities.
4. To examine the concept of stigma.

Through these objectives, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive and critical understanding of the Muslim community as represented in Hosseini's fiction.

Stereotypes:

The representation of stereotype in Khaled Hosseini's novels is deeply connected to both global perception of Muslim and the internal realities of Afghan society. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini begins with the portrayal of Kabul in the 1970s as a culturally vibrant socially interconnected space. Amir's childhood memories-kite flying tournament, and family gathering, and storytelling-depicts a society grounded in affection and tradition. This initial depiction directly challenges the stereotype of Afghanistan as inherently violent or backward. The famous kite tournament scene, where Hassan runs the last kite for Amir, symbolizes loyalty and innocence. Hassan's declaration "for you, a thousand times over" reflects deep emotional commitment, countering any notion that Afghan Muslim relationships lack tenderness or humanity. However the later episode of Hassan's assault introduces

violence into the narrative but this violence is not framed as a product of Islam but as a consequence of power, ethnicity, and moral failure. Assef's brutality is rooted in his ideological extremism and ethnic prejudice against Hazaras, rather than religious teachings. By presenting Assef as an individual shaped by distorted beliefs and social hierarchy, Hosseini avoids reinforcing the stereotype that Islam itself promotes violence. Instead the novels reveals how historical and social factors generate such acts not religion.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Hosseini directly confronts stereotypes about Muslim women. Mariam's early life as a "harami" (illegitimate child) and her forced marriage to Rasheed shows the structural inequalities within Afghan society. Rasheed's treatment of Mariam and Laila and forcing them to wear "burqa" restricting their movement, and subjecting them to domestic violence. However, Hosseini complicates this reading by distinguishing between cultural practices and Islamic ethics. Rasheed repeatedly invoked religion to justify his authority, yet his behaviour contradicts core Islamic values of compassion and justice. The turning point in the novel occurs when Mariam kills Rasheed to protect Laila. This act, while violent, is framed as morally justified. Mariam's acceptance of punishment further elevates her as an ethical figure, not as passive victim. Through her, Hosseini redefines the image of the Muslim woman as someone capable of agency, resistance, and moral courage.

Hosseini also portrays how stereotypes evolve under political regimes. During Taliban rule, public punishment, restrictions on women, and rigid enforcement of laws contribute to global perception of Muslim as oppressive. However, by situating these practices within a specific political context, Hosseini suggests that such representations are products of historical circumstances rather than intrinsic features of Islam.

Deviation:

The theme of deviation in Khaled Hosseini's Novels is central to understanding his representation of Muslim community. Rather than portraying Islam as inherently problematic, Hosseini carefully distinguishes between Islamic ethical principles and their distortion in practice. He shows how power structures, patriarchy, and ideological extremism can distort religious teachings, creating a gap between ideal Islam and lived reality.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, deviation is mostly visible embodied in the character of Rasheed. His behaviour marked by domestic violence, emotional cruelty contrast to ethical foundations of Islam Hosseini uses Rasheed's character to illustrate how religious discourse can be selectively interpreted to legitimize patriarchal dominance. This form of deviation is not presented as an expression of Islam, but as a misuse of religious authority for personal control. The broader political context of the Taliban

regime amplifies this theme. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the Taliban's enforcement of rigid laws—such as prohibiting women from working, mandating strict dress codes—represents the generalized form of deviation. Hosseini depicts scenes of public execution and social restrictions to highlight the severity of these practices.

In *The Kite Runner*, deviation operates in a more subtle yet equally significant manner. The character of Assef embodies ideological extremism that distorts both religion and Identity. His violent action, particularly against Hassan and Sohrab, are justified through a belief in ethnic superiority and moral absolutism. Hosseini presents Assef not as a representative of Islam, but as an example of how fanaticism and prejudice corrupt moral values. Another type of deviation in *The Kite Runner*, is Amir's moral failure and subsequent journey towards redemption. Amir's silence during Hassan's assault represents a deviation from ethical responsibility. Amir's later attempt to ransom for his actions can be interpreted as a return to these ethical principles, emphasizing that deviation is not permanent but can be corrected through self-awareness and action. Thus, deviation in Hosseini's Novels is not merely a thematic concern but a central analytical lens through which the complexities of the Muslim community are explored.

Islamic Diaspora:

The theme of diaspora occupies a central place in Khaled Hosseini's novels, whereas the Muslim community is presented not within the geographical boundaries of Afghanistan but also across transnational spaces. Islamic diaspora is not merely a physical relocation but a transformation of identity, memory, and cultural belonging. Through his characters, Hosseini illustrates how Muslim identity becomes fluid, hybrid, and negotiated in the context of global movement. In *The Kite Runner*, the experience of diaspora is most vividly portrayed through Amir and Baba's migration to the United States following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Their relocation marks a significant shift from a position of social privilege in Kabul to one of marginality in foreign land. Baba, once a respected and affluent figure, struggles to adapt to his new life, working at a gas station and grappling with a loss of status. For Amir, diaspora becomes a space of both alienation and self-discovery. While he gradually assimilates into American society; pursuing education, developing a writing career, and forming new relationships, he remains emotionally tied to his Afghan roots. His childhood memories, his unresolved guilt toward Hassan, and his eventual return to Afghanistan all indicate that diaspora does not erase cultural identity but rather reconfigures it through memory and longing. This dual belonging highlights the hybrid nature of Muslim identity in exile, where individuals exist between two cultural worlds.

The Afghan immigrant community in California further illustrates the dynamics of diaspora. Social gatherings, traditional customs, and shared language create a sense of continuity and collective identity among displaced Muslims. At the same time, these communities must navigate the pressure of assimilation and the challenges of maintaining cultural authenticity in a foreign environment. Hosseini presents diaspora as a negotiated space, where tradition and adaptation coexist. Overall, Hosseini presents Islamic diaspora as a multidimensional experience. At the same time, he highlights the emotional costs of diaspora, including loss, nostalgia, and fragmentation, thereby offering a deeply human perspective on migration. Thus Islamic diaspora serves as a crucial lens for understanding the evolving nature of the Muslim community in a globalized world.

Stigmas of Islam:

The theme of stigma plays a crucial role in Khaled Hosseini's representation of the Muslim community, revealing how identity is shaped not only by faith and culture but also by processes of marginalization, exclusion, and social judgment. In his novels, stigma operates on multiple levels—within Afghan society itself as well as in broader global contexts—highlighting the complex and often painful realities of belonging and otherness. By examining the experiences of stigmatized characters, Hosseini exposes the fractures within the Muslim community while also addressing the external prejudices that define Muslim identity in the contemporary world. Within Afghan society, stigma is most prominently depicted through ethnic discrimination, particularly in *The Kite Runner*. The character of Hassan, a Hazara, occupies a marginalized position despite sharing the same religious identity as Amir. He is repeatedly subjected to derogatory labels and treated as socially inferior, reflecting entrenched hierarchies within the Muslim community. This internal stigma demonstrates that shared faith does not necessarily guarantee equality or unity. Instead, it reveals how ethnicity and class intersect with religion to produce systems of exclusion. Hassan's unwavering loyalty and moral integrity stand in stark contrast to the prejudice he faces, thereby exposing the injustice of such stigmatization.

Similarly, the stigma associated with illegitimacy is explored through Mariam's character in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Branded as a "harami" from childhood, Mariam internalizes a sense of shame and unworthiness that shapes her identity and life choices. This form of stigma operates within a cultural framework that assigns moral value based on birth and social status. Hosseini portrays how such labeling can have long-lasting psychological effects, reinforcing social hierarchies and limiting individual agency. However, Mariam's eventual

act of sacrifice challenges this imposed identity, transforming her from a figure of shame into one of dignity and moral strength.

Gender-based stigma is another significant dimension in Hosseini's novels. Women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are often subjected to societal expectations that restrict their autonomy and define their worth in relation to men. Practices such as enforced veiling, limited mobility, and domestic confinement contribute to a stigmatized perception of women who deviate from prescribed roles. While these conditions may appear to confirm external stereotypes about Islam, Hosseini complicates this narrative by showing that such practices are deeply rooted in patriarchal cultural norms rather than Islamic principles. Through characters like Laila and Mariam, he demonstrates that women are not merely passive recipients of stigma but active agents who resist and redefine their identities. Thus, stigma in Hosseini's fiction functions as a powerful analytical lens through which the complexities of the Muslim community can be understood.

Conclusion:

The novels of Khaled Hosseini present nuanced and humanized portrayal of the Muslim community, challenging reductive stereotypes and highlighting its internal diversity. Through themes of stereotype, deviation, diaspora, and stigma, Hosseini reveals the complexities of Muslim identity shaped by culture, history, and socio-political forces. His work distinguishes between Islamic ethical ideals and their misinterpretation, while also addressing issues of displacement and marginalization. Ultimately, his fiction portrays Muslim identity as dynamic and evolving, fostering empathy and deeper understanding. In doing so, Hosseini contributes significantly to reshaping global perceptions of Islam and Muslim communities in contemporary literature.

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