

**IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS ON HUMAN  
RELATIONSHIPS: A STUDY OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S *AND THE  
MOUNTAINS ECHOED***



**L** OVELY  
**P** ROFESSIONAL  
**U** NIVERSITY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
**DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS**  
IN  
**ENGLISH**

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**Phagwara (Punjab)**

**April, 2015**

## ***DECLARATION***

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been written by me of my personal efforts, and has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or any similar title to any other university.

Dated :

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## ***CERTIFICATE***

This is to certify that the research on the topic “**Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on Human Relationships: A study of Khaled Hosseini’s *And the Mountains Echoed***” is done by **Jasgeet Marwah** under my guidance and supervision, and to the best of my knowledge, the present work is the result of her original research and study. It is further certified that the research work has been completed within the stipulated time allotted to her.

Dated:

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## ***Abstract***

This thesis is an attempt to analyse the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* written by Afghan American author Khaled Hosseini. This is his third novel after *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. *And the Mountains Echoed* reflects the story of two siblings and their separation due to the financial instability of the family. This incident marks the beginning of the story and the eventual meeting of the brother sister after years gives an end to the novel. This novel describes how the social and economic factors are responsible for driving people to take actions that would have far reaching consequences and affect the lives of characters involved directly or indirectly in those actions. Hosseini also narrates in the story the lives of Afghan expatriates and their link with their country. In a very subtle manner he describes the issue of homosexuality in Afghanistan. The problem of the opium economy in Afghanistan and its impact on the families of drug lords and also on the families of those people who have been displaced from their lands by the corrupt drug lords, has been given a detailed space in the novel. To analyse this novel, the theory of cultural materialism will be applied. This theory will help to scrutinize the intersections between social, economic, cultural and political influences on the lives of characters involved. The conclusion of this work suggests how this theory could be used further to analyze novels written with Afghanistan as the main setting.

## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

Foremost, I thank the one true and supreme Almighty, without His will this work could not have been possible.

I would like to express my very great appreciation to my research supervisor Ms. Vani Khurana, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Lovely Professional University for putting me through this challenge, guiding me with her valuable suggestions and useful critiques. Her advices on this research and my career will always be priceless. I am also grateful to Mr. Balkar Singh for going beyond the call of duty to help me and sharing his instructive views regarding this work. To Dr. Anshu Raina, I'll always be appreciative for her unending concern and encouragement.

My special thanks to my parents and brother who motivated me at every step. Their love and support is what has sustained me this far. I express thanks to all my friends, especially C. Lisela Anar, her assurance and trust in me encouraged me to keep on trying. Finally, I would like to thank Deepankar Thakur for his involvement in this work, his help and consolation during hard times and for being a constant reader of the many drafts that I wrote for this work.

**JASGEET MARWAH**

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# **Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on Human Relationships: A study of Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed***

## **Introduction**

Social and economic factors are one of the most substantial factors responsible for the progress or downfall of a nation. A nation is formed by the social, economic, political and cultural consciousness of its people. Men happen to create a conscience that is in accordance with the social, economic, political and cultural aspects of the nation. To analyze how an individual gets trapped in the labyrinth of social and economic web the theory of cultural materialism is considered relevant. Cultural Materialism as a theory traces its origin to the works of Raymond Williams who is considered as one of the founding figures of Cultural Studies along with Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. He coined the term in his book *Marxism and Literature* published in 1977. This theory evolved from Marxist ideology that culture is determined by the material and economic factors. In the introduction by Ernest Mandel to Marx's *Capital*, he says

In the socio-economic development of mankind, commodity production, market economy or the distribution of social resources among different branches of production by 'objective economic laws' operating 'behind the back of the producers' do not correspond to 'human nature', have not always existed and will not always exist. (Mandel 13)

The unequal distribution of income is the reason behind the actions of bourgeois people. William describes cultural materialism as "a theory of the specificities of material, cultural and literary production within historical materialism" (Williams 5). According to him culture is a whole way of life. There is a link between the social and economic inequalities and the cultural practices of an area. This theory is an approach to study culture and attempts to accommodate the fact that the actions carried out by humans is the consequence of the culture they have to perform in. In his book *Culture and Society* he says that "Culture is the product of the old leisured classes who seek now to defend it against new and destructive forces" (Williams 319). The preserving of culture demands that people have to do what has been considered to be the rightful act. It is a

never ending social process that changes the ways of living of people. Actions are not decided and acted upon individually. It is the whole of the organization that drives people to act and this stimulates the actions of other people. This theory analyzes social and economic systems and their effect on the people by studying an intelligent and creative work of art in relation to particular traditions and societies. It proposes to study all activities in a society and their inter-relations with its components. The analysis of culture then, William says, is of great importance because “it can yield specific evidence about the whole organization within which it was expressed.” It is an attempt to discover reasons behind the complexity of relationships. Cultural Materialists insist that, “Whatever the “textuality” of history, a culture and its literary products are always to an important degree conditioned by the material forces and relations of production in their historical era” (Abrams, 194). The material forces therefore are a major reason behind the working of a particular culture

Williams insists that individuals do not function on their own. The social and economic conditions of the era are what drive the people of a nation. A timeless and ceaseless relation exists between an individual and the society and economy at large. He focuses on the dynamics of relationships in context to their environment. Don Milligan in his *Raymond Williams: Hope and Defeat in the Struggle for Socialism* says about Williams,

Recognition of the importance of both continuity and change lay at the heart of his creative enterprise. It was an enterprise in which, as a teacher, critic, novelist, and political activist, he focused upon the mediations between the ordinary commitments of everyday life and the wider relationships in which they take place. (Milligan 5)

While the text under consideration reflects the culture in which it is written, it also participates in the same culture. In other words, its very existence vicissitudes the culture it reflects. Therefore literature helps to raise awareness and amend certain elements of the culture that have been in existence since long without being probed and challenged. There have been significant number of books written that have offered unique insights about the world around us and have changed the course of history. For instance, *1984* by George Orwell, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir to name a very few.



Cultural materialists stress that their criticism is concerned toward radical involvement in their own era in order to restore the social order which exploits people on grounds of race, gender and class. Culture cannot be independent of the economic and political system. There is an unending struggle between the individual and the society, between the person and the community and this functions as the basis of the theory of cultural materialism. Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore have made current and significant developments in this theory. In their book *Political Shakespeare* they explain how the writings of Shakespeare were largely influenced by the political forces of his era and how the staging practices reflect the developments in the society. They insist that in order to analyze a text it is necessary to analyze what was happening when the text was being written. Any meaning that a text might have is always related to the much wider cultural and social institutions and practices of its context because every society has its own form, objectives and significance. In his essay *What is Nation*, Ernest Renan says,

Man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains. A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, create the kind of moral conscience which we call a nation. So long abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist. (Renan 18)

This thesis is an attempt to explore the relationship between the theory of cultural materialism as given by Raymond Williams and the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* written by Afghan American author Khaled Hosseini published in 2013.

Author of three international best sellers and one of the most beloved classics, Khaled Hosseini has become the publishing phenomenon since his first novel *The Kite Runner* hit the book stores in 2003 followed by *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in 2007. *The Kite Runner* narrates the story of two friends Asif and Hassan growing up in Kabul, their love, betrayal and redemption. The novel was the first of its kind that attained worldwide attention for its portrayal of Afghanistan in its real sense. Hosseini shows us the good and bad equally. Edward Hower from *The New York Times* considers the portrayal of Afghanistan before and after the Taliban:

Hosseini's depiction of pre-revolutionary Afghanistan is rich in warmth and humor but also tense with the friction between the nation's different ethnic groups ... The novel's canvas turns dark when Hosseini describes the suffering of his country under the tyranny of the Taliban, whom Amir encounters when he finally returns home, hoping to help Hassan and his family. The final third of the book is full of haunting images: a man, desperate to feed his children, trying to sell his artificial leg in the market; an adulterous couple stoned to death in a stadium during the halftime of a football match; a rouged young boy forced into prostitution, dancing the sort of steps once performed by an organ grinder's monkey. (Hower)

He depicts the realities of class struggle and the political turmoil of the country and its effect on the relationships between the characters in the novel. Afghanistan which has acquired the image of war, brutality and Islamic orthodoxy was once a happy country where children were free to play games and fly kites. There was abundance of richness in the Afghan culture but due to the war that has spanned years and generations, the world view of Afghanistan has been limited only to the Taliban and the brutalities caused by it. The novel was adapted into a movie of the same name in 2007 and was nominated for Golden Globe Award for best foreign language film.

His second novel *A Thousand Splendid Sons* which is more female oriented is based on the lives of two Afghan women Laila and Mariam and the difficulties, discrimination, gender based violence faced by them during and after the thirty years of Afghan turmoil from the abuses of Soviet domination to the vehemence of the Mujahedeen and finally the tyranny of the Taliban. Hosseini portrays an intense environment where the role of women is limited and defined only by bearing children, boys in this case. Alan Marshall reviews the novel as: “a view from inside the burqa of the nightmare of Afghanistan's history over 30 years, from Communism to gangsterism, apparently reaching its nadir with the grim nihilism of the Taliban”.

His recent novel *And the Mountains Echoed* on which this thesis is based revolves around assorted human relationships affected by the decisions taken by people involved as a result of their own choices and also as a result of the socio-economic factors that surround their culture. Hosseini's works have been generally classified as having the universal themes of familial relationships, the setting in particular being Afghanistan. He traces the history of Afghanistan and its present situation, the horrifying effects of the war on the people and their lives. He also talks

about the lives of those who as a result of the war and political instability have to seek asylum in other countries, their sense of being away from their homeland and their experience with the world which is not their own. The idea of this novel as Hosseini said in an interview, “began with a single image in my head that I simply could not shed. It was the image of a man walking across the desert and he’s pulling a little radio flyer red wagon, and in it there’s a girl about three years old, and there’s a boy walking behind him, and these three people are walking across the desert” (NPR, May 19). He was inspired to write about this while he came across the poverty and the impoverishment in the country during his visit to Afghanistan with the UN Refugee Agency in 2007. He heard the stories of people who actually had to part away with their children due to the bitter colds and their inability to provide them with the most basic amenities.

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965. His father was a diplomat in the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and History at a high school in Kabul. The Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris in 1976. They could not return to Kabul because of the hostile conditions there in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion. The family has since then lived in the United States after being granted the political asylum. Hosseini graduated from Independence High School in San Jose in 1984, earned his bachelor’s degree in biology from Santa Clara University in 1988. In 1993, he completed his M.D from the University of California, San Diego. He completed his residency in internal medicine at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles in 1996. Khaled Hosseini was a practicing physicist until 2004. Hosseini’s memories of his childhood in the pre-Soviet era in Afghanistan are the basis of his portraying the country in an affectionate light. In 2006 Hosseini was named a Goodwill Envoy to United Nations High Commission to Refugees (UNHCR). He has been visiting Afghanistan since 2003 where he “felt like a tourist in his own country.” During these visits he has had the chance to sit down with those people who had experienced the war and violence in the country. These stories or some part of these have become the inspiration of his novels. Of his professions as a doctor and a writer, he said in an interview, “In both professions one needs to appreciate how socio-economic background, family, culture, language, religion and other factors shape a person, whether it is a patient in an exam room or a character in a story.”

All his three novels trace the social, economic and political history of Afghanistan and the impact it has had over the people. As John Brannigan rightly points out in his *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*,

Literature is a vehicle for the representation of history, and it does contain insights into the formation of historical moments. It reveals the processes and tensions by which historical change comes about. But it does not reflect history as mirror. It sees literature as a constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making, and therefore rife with the creative forces, and disruptions and contradictions, of history. (Brannigan 418)

Hence it is interesting and necessary to have an insight into the social and economic conditions of Afghanistan in order to analyze any of his novels. *And the Mountains Echoed* is a tale revolving around characters and situations spanning generations and decades traversing from Shadbagh, an imaginary place in Afghanistan to Paris, Greece and finally the States. Hosseini builds his novel that is divided into nine chapters told from perspectives of different characters, on the essential human relationships and how they flourish, nurture, endure and succumb amidst the culture they grow in. He communicates to millions of people the complex and complicated lives of the people of his origin country Afghanistan which was once as peaceful as it could never be now. He shows to us the complex, complicated and war-torn fabric of Afghan culture. In all his three novels the inner lives of characters are influenced by an often brutal and unforgiving outside world, and the decisions they make about their own lives are influenced by things over which they have slightest control. This novel whose roots are set in Afghanistan cannot be read and understood in isolation with the society and economy of the country. As Nadeem Aslam said of this country in his *The Wasted Vigil*,

Even the air of this country has a story to tell about warfare. It is possible here to lift a piece of bread from a plate and following it back to its origins, collect a dozen stories concerning war- how it affected the hand that pulled it out of the oven, the hand that kneaded the dough, how war impinged upon the field where wheat was grown. (Aslam 89)

The war in this novel is not just the external turmoil the country has been facing since the last fifty decades, but also the inner turmoil that affects the human relationships. According to a

research *Cost of War* done by Afghanistan's non-governmental organizations: "The past three decades of war and disorder have had a devastating impact on the Afghan people. Millions have been killed, millions more have been forced to flee their homes and the country's infrastructure and forests have all but been destroyed. The social fabric of the country is fractured and state institutions are fragile and weak" (3). The socio-economic factors of the country set the trap for its people to fall into. In the unendurable climate with its harsh winters bringing its toil upon the poor and large families, some choices have to be made in order to breathe for a few more years. When the brutal cold takes away the life of Saboor's new born baby, he decides to give away Pari, his three year old daughter to the affluent Wahdati couple in Kabul in order to secure himself a job and to lessen the number of mouths to be fed- "*a finger cut, to save the hand.*" (Hosseini 33) Poverty leads him to sell his child, his only daughter. The opaque future is given the hope that certain new and better things will happen. This incident sets in motion the series of events in the novel. One act of selling a daughter effects all the relationships. As Hosseini said in an interview, "In Afghanistan, you don't understand yourself solely as an individual. You understand yourself as a son, a brother, a cousin to somebody, an uncle to somebody. You are part of something bigger than yourself".

The title of *And the Mountains Echoed* has been derived from a line in William Blake's poem 'The Nurse's Song': and the hills echoed. The novel is divided into nine chapters, told from different perspectives but inextricably linked with each other. The core of the novel is the separation of the two siblings and their eventual meeting at the end of the novel. *And the Mountains Echoed* describes the rich culture and traditions of this war-torn country in the process of destruction. It is not the individual choices, but choices made collectively to save a number of lives that affect the present and shape the future of the lives of characters in the novel. The characters are victims of troubling times. Hosseini represents the ways of life and struggle of Afghan people under adverse circumstances. Unparalleled loyalties go hand in hand with merciless betrayals. The incidents of Saboor's giving away of Pari so that he could give his family an easy life; Parwana's leaving Masooma alone in the desert to die so that she could have the life she has always wanted to live; Nabi's having spur the main action in the novel (suggesting Saboor to give away Pari) in order to give happiness to a childless woman are all examples of how humans are led to take decisions that would later bring the most undesirable consequences. Adel's Baba taking away somebody else's land and doing the business of manufacturing opium in the name of modernizing Shadbagh depicts

that the country is still in a war that is supported by its own people (Afghanistan is the world's largest illicit opium producer). Suleiman Wahdati loves his chauffeur Nabi but lives a loveless life because of his adherence to the strict Afghan moral code. Nila Wahdati moves with her adopted daughter Pari to Paris because she thinks Afghanistan is not the place to confirm her modern and passionate ideas. Timur and Idris depict the life of Afghan expatriates and how they face the troubling situations when they come back to Afghanistan. This immigrant experience in his novels is auto-biographical to some extent. Such actions which have their consequences echoing throughout the novel are justified by Nabi when he says, "I suspect the truth is that we are waiting, all of us, against insurmountable odds, for something extraordinary to happen to us" (Hosseini 104). Hosseini weaves an intimate thread between the inner lives of the characters and the external world that exerts pressure on these characters and their fate. The actions are based on the fact that the results will bring better times than the present. In his 1985 essay *Walking backward into the future*, Raymond Williams builds his discussion around ideas of despair on the one hand and confidence of hope on the other. Even in situations of political failures and economic decline, there are people who propose ways to escape out of this web. He says:

The morale of generations of struggle was sustained by the belief that the future was ours. It is not often like that today. Actual majorities, including very many young people, have lost this conventional hope, from the experience of repeated political failures and long term economic decline. Our future is now regularly defined in terms of dangers; the threat of nuclear war; the probability of large-scale structural unemployment the steady working through of ecological crisis. Many of us still respond actively, and propose different ways forward. But this change in thinking about the future is taking its toll.

Though in this novel, unlike Hosseini's other two novels, the detailed and gory descriptions of war have not been given the center stage. The narrative of this novel concentrates more on the after effects of war, the devastation caused by it that has turned cities into war zones and gave rise to warlords like Adel's baba and caused the Afghans to move to various parts of the world like Nila Wahdati, Abdullah, Idris and Timur.

This research attempts to explore how the Afghan society is influenced by the social and economic factors of the country and how these factors are responsible for the actions and their

consequences in the novel. The objectives of this study are to analyze the assertive and dominant factors responsible for the consequences of the decisions and choices made by people with reference to the Afghan society as represented in the novel and also considering the historical background of the country and also the present situation, the difference in what was fifty years ago and what it is now. The research will also examine the effect of politics, economy and cultural factors on the life of Afghans, compelling them to willingly or unwillingly accept their decisions and live with them for the rest of their lives.

D. Bhattacharjee in an article *Myriad Relationships on the Verge of Collapse: Khaled Hosseini's And the Mountains Echoed* says that though the story has traveled to parts of Europe but still Afghanistan is the always present in the backdrop and also in the hearts of the characters as well who have become a part of the war and poverty driven diaspora that has also led to the widespread exodus. The readers are transported to the Afghanistan of the 1950s where they can smile, cry and feel pity right alongside the characters in the book.

Arunima Mazumdar's review article in The Times of India says, "Khaled Hosseini is natural at storytelling. It is almost as easy as a daily chore for him. An effortless narration, evocative of myriad shades of human emotions and relations, 'And the Mountains Echoed' envelops the greater themes that shadow our lives too.'

The New York Times writer Michiko Kakutani says of this novel, "And so we finish this novel with an intimate understanding of who his characters are and how they've defined themselves over the years through the choices they have made between duty and freedom, familial responsibilities and independence, loyalty to home and exile abroad. All this, played out against the backdrop of Afghanistan's tumultuous history - from the pre-Soviet era through the years of the mujahedeen's fight against the Soviet Union, the rise of the Taliban and the American invasion after the terrorist attacks of Sept 11."

Donna Rifkind says of the novel, "Each of Khaled Hosseini's novels- The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, and his newest, And the Mountains Echoed- begins with a betrayal and then gradually finds its way toward an unexpected redemption. Each includes within its cast of characters at least one orphaned child. In all three books, the author exhibits an unabashed

didacticism, using plain spoken family dramas to convey the complex recent history and culture of Afghanistan to multitudes of readers in America and around the world. Yet in each of the books the author's allegiance is above all to the story, from which he has stripped away most stylistic enhancements, reducing his tale to its emotional essence. To Hosseini's detractors, his narrative purity comes off as trite earnestness."

Suvro Chatterjee reviews the novel as something that traverses through generations and countries: " This book too, originates in Afghanistan; indeed most of it dwells on present-day, war torn, poverty-ravaged, religion-and-drug-crazed Afghanistan, but it covers a much longer time span than the previous ones, travels all over the world from Greek islands to Paris to Spain to California and even fleetingly to India, and deals simultaneously with a much greater number and variety of characters, most of whom interweave and interact with one another in one way or the other, in the best tradition of grand narratives of yesteryear."

Rachel Hore of The Independent says that a part of Hosseini's effectiveness as a storyteller is the way he draws on universal signifiers of myth and symbol. In a prelude to the novel, Saboor tells his son a fable about a "div" or demon who forces a father to choose a child to give up to him, the implications only later clear to Abdullah. The author uses archetypes: the wicked stepmother, the master and the servant, the brothers (in this case cousins) who are friends yet rivals, but his skill is to put flesh on them, to make them real and individual.

These reviews clearly depict how the country has suffered from war and political turmoil. The effect it has had on the people is vast and terrorizing. There have been other novels written with Afghanistan as the background. *A Fort of Nine Towers* by Qais Akbar Omar is an autobiographical novel published in 2013 and depicts the sufferings of the Afghan people due to the ongoing war. He talks about the people who have lived and suffered the brutalities of Mujahedeen and Taliban. The work as the author says is inspired by the novels of Khaled Hosseini. *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis published in 2000 talks about the life of an eleven year old girl Parwana who is forced by the circumstances to become the breadwinner of the family in the war-ravaged Afghanistan. These and few other novels with Afghanistan as the setting talk about the sufferings of its people. *And the Mountains Echoed* builds its themes on a wide variety of themes ranging from personal relationships to the politics and war lords of the country and the Afghan expatriates.



Literature and society are thus very closely bonded. As Meenakshi Mukherjee points out in her essay *Narrating a Nation*,

Everyone knows that all narratives are to be read in the context of a specific time and place but we must remember that while the narratives emerge out of a culture, they also contribute towards the construction of this culture. Stories and communities are thus bound together in a symbolic relationship. (Mukherjee 19)

The issue of culture and its impact on the socio-economic lives of the people has been central to all the three novels of Hosseini. The Afghan community has suffered greatly from the political and military unrests, the Soviet invasion and the severe droughts and harsh winters have added to the miseries and difficulties faced by the people. Afghanistan works more than just a simple setting in this novel. Hosseini depicts Afghanistan in his novel, a place of conflict inhabiting cultures, affecting the socio-economic lives of the people of the country. Hosseini's novels have been critically acclaimed and have been translated into different languages. He has changed the world view of the Afghan society.

For the present research, the relevant aspects of the theory of cultural materialism will be employed in order to bring out the issue of economic and social subordination over the lives of people. The methodology of the research will be based on qualitative descriptive method by studying the issue of the effect of socio-economic factors on the lives of the characters represented in the novel. No significant amount of research has been done on this novel and through this dissertation the novel would be researched upon considerably. I will also explore how *And the Mountains Echoed* is placed within the historical context of Afghanistan, its economy and the modern society.

## Chapter One

### **Individuals trapped in the Labyrinth of Economy and Society in *And the Mountains Echoed***

*And the Mountains Echoed* has its main setting in Afghanistan, a country entangled by decades of conflict and a flickering economy. Poverty, poor household conditions, lack of employment, war and illiteracy have been the causes of many Afghans fleeing the country for a better future in the west. Raymond Williams studied culture as an outcome of the economic forces which in turn affect the lives of the people. There is an underlying relation between the means of production in an economy and its relation with the society. No civilization has been able to flourish and prosper without a successful and productive economy. Economy is the driving force of any nation.

The year when this novel begins is 1952, the reign of King Zahir Khan, wherein the times are peaceful but poverty engulfs the country. Saboor is walking through the deserts of Shadbagh to Kabul with his three year old daughter Pari and seven year old son Abdullah. The two children are unaware of what awaits them once they reach the city. On their journey to Kabul Saboor tells them a story of a village called Maidan Sabz, a desolate place devoid of water and other amenities essential for a basic living. "... People in Maidan Sabz worked twice as hard to eke out half the living" (Hosseini 2). One of the inhabitants of the village is Baba Ayub who lived with a large family to feed with a meagre income but "Still, Baba Ayub counted himself among the fortunate because he had a family that he cherished above all things" (Hosseini 2). He loved his youngest son Qais more than the other four. A div often came to the nearby villages and took away with him little children and never returned them back. This village has been spared for long from the evil of the div but this time div came to take away a child and when the div knocked on Baba Ayub's door, it was Qais who had to be compromised- "A finger cut to save the hand" (Hosseini 5). Later Baba Ayub comes to know that his son is in the best of environment, the one he could never in his lifetime provide to any of his children. Saboor's narration of this folktale to his children is a forecast of what will happen to them once they reach Kabul. The folktale represents that Saboor unconsciously

wants to prepare his children for the harsh fate that awaits them. He lacks the courage to tell them and so he builds up the tale of the atrocious Div. The Div is a myth Saboor creates. A myth that his children will believe. He creates it to prove that his actions are justified, that he is doing what Baba Ayub did and in the end Baba Ayub's son was far from him and happy. It helps him escape from the burden of selling his daughter to a couple that was so distanced from each other. Saboor's son Abdullah is more than a brother to Pari. He is her second mother, the first one died giving birth to Pari. He is the one performing the role of both father and mother to her,

He was the one raising her. It was true. Even though he was still a child himself. Ten years old. When Pari was an infant, it was he she had awakened at night with her squeaks and mutters, he who had walked and bounced her in the dark. He had changed her soiled diapers. He had been the one to give Pari her baths. (Hosseini 31)

This role of a mother gets transferred to Abdullah once his mother died, and the burden of which increased when his father marries again- "They weren't her (his second mother) children, he and Pari. Most people loved their own. It couldn't be helped that he and his sister didn't belong to her. They were other woman's leftovers" (Hosseini 22). Though Abdullah performs the task of caring for Pari out of the unflinching and unyielding love he has for her, he seldom knows that his father is going to sell his sister to a wealthy family in Kabul. This decision of selling his only daughter in spite of one of his two sons also points towards the society's inability of thinking that it is the girl (in the long run) who would be responsible for improving the financial conditions of the family and thereby contributing towards the economy of the country. In his foreword to the 1986 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks* by Fanon, Bhabha describes how the individual will is shaped and decided by the general will of the society, its law and the culture. He says

The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will-Law or Culture-where Psyche and Society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference, without loss, into a historical totality. (Bhabha xxvi)

The pressure from the outer forces of economy and society makes the psyche reflect society. The economic pressure is the main reason for his decision for selling away his daughter but the

reason for selling only his daughter and not any of his sons is a result of the psyche he has formed of the lesser capability of the daughter in comparison to the male child in giving back to the family what she has taken from it and contributing to its financial conditions consequentially.

The poor economic conditions of Saboor's family makes him compromise his daughter. This decision affects the lives of the characters involved. A three year old Pari is given away to the Wahdati family in Kabul while Abdullah is left to believe "It's for the best" (Hosseini 45). In lieu of selling his daughter, the Wahdati's offer Saboor a job that would pay him well. He had felt responsible for the death of his son Omar who had died because of the brutal cold because Saboor could not provide the baby with better winter clothes and heavier blankets. He does not want to let his family die while he celebrates over whether or not to give away his daughter. Thus in the course of one day a three year old Pari is orphaned by her own father and given away to be nurtured by another couple. Abdullah is not given any explanation for this act other than Parwana, his step mothers' words, "It had to be her. I am sorry, Abdullah. She had to be the one" (Hosseini 48). The material world conditions the social world and affects the relationships throughout the novel. Williams refers in his *Marxism and Literature* to an excerpt in Marx's 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that proves how the material factors are responsible for the actions of men and women-

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Williams 75)

Cultural materialists tend to draw our attention to how the superior forces in a society abuse and capitalize on the marginalized on the grounds of their status in the society. The earlier readings of the texts ignored the role of the marginalized classes. Cultural materialism as a literary theory reflects on the importance of this class and its role in such texts. The Wahdati family in this novel acts as the div of the folktale, who takes the children away from their family in order to provide them with a better lifestyle. This could have also been possible by providing the financial assistance to the family while it was allowed that the parents keep the child. But the exploitation takes it final course when the Wahdati's exchange a menial job in lieu for Saboor's daughter. This proves how the elite class makes certain beliefs and ideologies that suppress the bourgeois people. This idea of

helping Pari creates an ideology in the mind of Saboor that he is totally incapable of raising up his children. The interests of Nila covers up the fact that in a way that is not noticeable, she is actually subjugating Saboor. She mother notices the pain she is going to cause to the siblings. She herself says, later in the novel that “nothing replaces a mother” (Hosseini 207) but instead acts an accomplice in separating the brother and sister. Being on the side lower in status, Saboor is the one paying a bigger price for the job that would have cost nothing to the Wahdati’s had they hired someone else. In his book *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* published in 1859 Marx observes that

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely [the] relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of consciousness.” (Marx 23)

Men unconsciously enter into the economic structure driven by the politics of the society and are forced to live their lives according to the superstructure that is the controlling force behind their lives and choices. Saboor is forcibly led into this web of complex situations in which sacrificing a child is his only option to break free from the poverty he and his family faces. It is not a choice he makes, rather a decision he is led to take because of the poor economic conditions prevalent. Nabi acts as the middleman between the Wahdati’s and Saboor. In fact, it is his idea to suggest Saboor to take this step even when he knew of the deepest of bond that existed between Pari and Abdullah,

No one but God knows why those two had chosen each other. It was a mystery. I have never seen such affinity between two beings. In truth, Abdullah was as much father to Pari as sibling. When she cried at night, it was he who sprung from the sleeping cot to walk her. It was he who took it upon himself to change her soiled linens, to bundle her up, to soothe her back to sleep. (Hosseini 93)

Cultural materialists also insist on issues like race, culture, class and gender. The preference of giving away the female child, without a second thought emphasizes the gender discrimination

prevalent in Afghan and particularly Muslim society. During Zahir Shah's reign from 1933 to 1973, the position of women improved and education for girls became a priority, but this empowerment was meant only for the women of the elite class like Nila Wahdati, Pari's adoptive mother. Pari, being born in a family of lower strata, was deprived of these amenities like education. Nila on the other hand, though subdued by her father, is highly educated. Raymond Williams points out in his *Marxism and Literature* that though the economic factors are responsible in driving and defining the actions of the people, they are not the only ones to be considered because the social, economic and cultural factors do not act individually, they are inextricably linked to each other. He observes that,

To say that 'men' define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. In a class society these are primarily inequalities between classes. (Williams 108)

This means that the inequality and suppression of the females is a part of the social practices of Afghanistan and this suppression further leads to the diminishing rate of growth of their economy. Even the marriage between the two paradoxical and incompatible characters Nila who is an "extraordinary woman" (Hosseini 87) and Suleiman Wahdati who is a "brooding old man trapped in a younger man's body" (Hosseini 89) is accomplished because of their higher material position in the society. Also, the dominant patriarchal society of Afghanistan does not allow women to remain unmarried. In his *Dominance without Hegemony* Ranajit Guha describes: "These unequal relationships, in spite of the bewildering diversity of their form and character and their numerous permutations, may all be said to have derived from a general relation- that of Dominance and a Subordination" (Guha 20).

The dominant patriarchal society of Afghanistan leads Nila to marry Suleiman in spite of having little or no bond of emotional relationship between them. Woman without a husband is considered a liability on the parents and therefore Nila marries in order to confront to these notions of the society. Her talent and her passion for writing would have been enough for a survival, only if it was not a society dominated by patriarchy.

Nabi notices when Suleiman asks him to drive to Nila's house in order to ask her father for her hand- "This was wealth of another magnitude, I recognized" (Hosseini 79). Suleiman could not have married Nila because of love. Being the members of the elite social class, the pressure of marriage fell also on them. Unanswerable to the society for their peculiar reasons of not marrying, they prefer a forced marriage to be a better option than rejection and condemnation of the society. Nila is an educated and talented woman and there is no reason for her to marry Suleiman, other than that she would not have been accepted by anyone else because of the rumors about her character and Suleiman marries her because he could not have had his homosexuality observed by the people around. They are able to marry each other and prove to the society that they have been married happily, in spite of the non-existence of any form of bond of love, because of their high social and financial status in the society. Thus two socially unaccepted people come together as a result of the existing power structure.

The poor and undeveloping economy of the Afghanistan has led to many Afghans move abroad for a better and secure life. Many people fled the country during the Soviet invasion of Russia that began in 1979 and lasted till 1989. According to a research *The Cost of War* done by a collaborative effort of various Afghan organizations the social and instability caused in the country has been vast. It says

After decades of relative stability, the overthrow of Daoud Khan in 1978 and the subsequent invasion by Soviet forces in 1979 marked the beginning of a prolonged period of conflict. As mujahedeen resistance groups grew in strength, waging guerrilla warfare and drawing Soviet forces further into the conflict, the abuses committed by both sides intensified. In the years of conflict that followed, more than 870,000 Afghans were killed, three million were maimed or wounded, a million were internally displaced and over five million were forced to flee the country. (3)

These facts prove the crumbled state of Afghanistan and its citizens. The folktale at the beginning of the novel summarizes the situation of Afghan expatriates when the div says,

This is his life now, and you saw for yourself his happiness. He is provided here with the finest food and clothes, with friendship and affection. He receives tutoring in the arts and

languages and in the sciences, and in the ways of wisdom and charity. He wants for nothing. Someday, when he is a man, he may choose to leave, and he shall be free to do so. I suspect he will touch many lives with his kindness and bring happiness to those trapped in sorrow. (Hosseini 11)

This clearly demonstrates the situation of the Afghan people who leave their country in order to provide their generation with a future that is unthinkable and unattainable in Afghanistan. Once they are accustomed to those privileges and the immunity from war, it becomes hard for them to return to their native country with completely contradicting environment. Nila and her daughter Pari, Abdullah and his family, the Bashiri family migrate to countries like Paris and the United States because of the political turmoil in the country.

The Bashiri family migrates to United States in the 1980s. These years were the years when a large number of Afghan families migrated to other countries in a desire to have a safe, protected and better life. In his letter to Mr. Markos, Nabi tells him “ Still, it was a time of exodus, and many families from our neighborhood packed their things and left the country for either Pakistan or Iran, with hopes of resettling somewhere in the west” (Hosseini 121). The instable economy, combined with the foreign invasions and the destruction caused because of that, has left the natives with no option but to relocate to other countries. After twenty three years, in 2003, the Bashiri cousins Idris and Timur return to their homeland in order to sell off the properties of their ancestors, the properties that had a high value now. They had come to

...reclaim the property that had belonged to their fathers, the house where both he and Idris had lived for the first fourteen years of their lives. The property’s worth is skyrocketing now that thousands of foreign-aid workers have descended on Kabul and need a place to live. (Hosseini 136)

The trammels of materialism and also the fact that life abroad has made them accustomed to a more appropriate life, makes these characters come back to earn profits out of the properties that belonged to their forefathers. They have been the lucky ones because “they weren’t [there] when the place was getting bombed to hell” (Hosseini 147). But when a small amount of peace returns to the country, they come back and behave like the “quintessential ugly Afghan-American”



(Hosseini 147), helping the old people around by giving them bakhshish and pretending like they have been a part of all their suffering and pain.

The Bashiri brothers come across a girl named Roshana in Afghanistan who has suffered from an attack on her head by an ax as a result of a fight between her father and uncle over a property dispute. Her situation after the attack has made her appearance horrendous. Idris after listening to her story thinks about “The crack in the crown of her shaved head, the fist-sized mass of glistening brain tissue leaking from it, sitting on her head like the knot of a Sikh’s turban” (Hosseini 151). The girl Roshana grows closer to Idris and starts calling him “Kaka Idris” (Hosseini 155). Even Idris finds himself attached to the girl like she is his own daughter:

When he is away from her, he thinks often of the faint yellow hairs on her arms, her narrow hazel eyes, her pretty feet, her rounded cheeks, the way she cups her chin in her hands as he reads her one of the children’s books he has picked up from a bookstore near the French lycée. A few times, he has allowed himself to fleetingly imagine what it would be like to bring her to the U.S., how she would fit in with his boys, Zbi and Lemar, back home.

Idris promises Amra Ademovic, Roshana’s nurse, to provide for the treatment of Roshana. She tells Idris that many people have promised that before:

...they come and take picture of her. They take video. They make promises. Then they go home and show their families. Like she is some zoo animal. I allow it because I think maybe they will help. But they forget, I never hear from them... (Hosseini 157).

When Idris and Timur return to Afghanistan they seldom remember the promises they made to people back in Afghanistan. Timur even has his name changed to “Tim” once he reaches America. Idris, after much delay, talks to his chief Joan Schaeffer about financing the treatment project of Roshana. Disturbingly, his boss’ denial of the noble cause due to insufficiency of funds brings a relief to Idris- “He gets up again, surprised that he is feeling lighter, almost relieved by her [boss’] response” (Hosseini 169). He justifies his action by making himself believe that it is his hard work that has given him all the luxuries and comforts of life and he need not feel guilty about not helping a poor girl

He is not a criminal. Everything he owns he has earned. In the nineties, while half the guys he knew were out clubbing and chasing women, he had been buried in study, dragging himself through hospital corridors at two in the morning, forgoing leisure, comfort, sleep. He had given his twenties to medicine. He has paid his dues. Why should he feel badly? This is his family. This is his life. (Hosseini 170)

He ignores his responsibility he had promised to fulfill because of the fact that he immersed himself in his sumptuous American life and did not want it to get spoiled or even changed because of a promise. Even when given a solution by his wife Nahil that he could help bring a change by donating to the causes in Afghanistan, he doesn't pay heed to her. He becomes one of those American and European people who considered Roshana as an animal, got amused by her and at the end left her on her own survival.

*And the Mountains Echoed* also emphasizes upon the unacceptability of children by their parents in order to escape the financial dependence children have on them. The prevalence of this factor is apparent where Madaline leaves her daughter Thalia in the care of her childhood friend Odelia who lives on the Greek island of Tinos, initially for a small period of time, but later she never comes back to take her daughter back. Thalia got a scar in her childhood after being bitten by a dog and always wears a veil to cover it. Markos, Odelia's son comes across Thalia when she is not wearing her veil and is drastically shocked when he sees her and describes her face as- "The dog hadn't bitten Thalia's face; it had *eaten* it" (Hosseini 286). Madaline for obvious reasons, is ashamed of her daughter and it is because of her mother's insistence that Thalia wears the veil- "That the mask had been for Madaline's benefit. To save *her* embarrassment and shame. (Hosseini 322). Madaline is an ambitious actress who is "married now to a wealthy and much older man, a Mr. Andreas Gianakos, who years before had produced her second and, as it turned out, last film" (Hosseini 281). This irrefutably exhibits that Madaline who is an attractive young woman marries a man much older to herself, for the sake of giving her career a substantial beginning. Her daughter is a stumbling block in pursuing her career in Athens and therefore she leaves her for a short time with Odelia and Markos, saying that it will be "Just for a few weeks" (Hosseini 318). Thalia's dependence on Madaline would have caused her being obliged to stay with her and not achieve prominence. In search for a new identity, Madaline chooses to abandon her daughter. Later in the

novel Markos comes across the obituary of Madaline in the newspaper that says that she was well known in the Athens artistic community. The obituary does not mention any surviving partner or children. This reveals that Madaline had clearly disowned her own daughter and had not mentioned about her daughter to anyone in Athens. Markos who initially had high thoughts about Madaline, of her hard and arduous life, imagines her as his mother had:

Madaline, the cartographer, sitting down, calmly drawing up the map of her future and neatly excluding her burdensome daughter from its borders. And she'd succeeded spectacularly, at least according to this obituary and its clipped account of a mannered life, a life rich with achievement, grace, respect. (Hosseini 328)

Hosseini also interweaves in *And the Mountains Echoed* the complexity of human relationships amidst the unjustifiable act of drug trade in the country. The incident that describes this takes place in the summer of 2009 in the novel. Afghanistan's opium production has increased fifteen times since 1979. According to a survey done by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDCP) Afghanistan is the world's largest opium producer in the world. This illicit drug manufacturing has been flourishing over the decades due to an unstable government in the country and the prolonged war that has had its effect on the economy. The war and instability in the economic and political situation has provided this drug market to expand to such extent.

The drug business is described in the novel amidst the changing scenario of Afghanistan, from the 50s to the present century, indicating that even the nature of war has shifted- from violent to non- violent but equally and even more destructive. The times have changed drastically in the novel, the small town of Shadbagh from where the novel begins has been transformed into Shadbagh-e-Nau (New Shadbagh). Adel's baba who is the pioneer of bringing this transformation in the village is the one responsible for the opium trade in the village. This business is handled by him, without the knowledge of his son and without the interference of his wife. "His [Adel's] father was leaving for the south in the morning to oversee his fields of cotton in Helmand and to meet with workers at the cotton factory he had built there" (Hosseini 246). Adel is unaware of this side business of opium manufacturing his father carries on. He justifies his bad deeds by doing good deeds because as he says, "it's important for the fortunate, for the people like us, to live up to their responsibilities" (Hosseini 246). He considers to balance his wrongdoings by improving the

condition of Shadbagh and some of its people. It is only when Adel meets Gholam, a boy almost the same age as Adel that he realizes what actual good deeds his father is doing. The house Adel's family lived in which had nine bedrooms and seven bathrooms and all the luxuries one could dream of, was built on the land seized from Gholam's father Iqbal:

“This was my [Gholam] family's tree. This was my family's land. It's been ours for generations. Your father built his mansion on our land. While we were in Pakistan during the war.” He pointed to the orchards. “These? They used to be people's homes. But your father had them bulldozed to the ground. Just like he brought down the house where my father was born, where he was raised”. (Hosseini 267)

As Kabir, one of his father's bodyguard tells Adel “Your father is a river to his people” (Hosseini 249). He is a river that has and is continuing to drown all the people of Shadbagh-e-Nau. As opposed to the lower class people who indulge into this trade in order to retrench and pay the debts they have been pushed into, Adel's baba's motives seem nothing but lust and greed for money and power. The main reason for traders like him to enter this business of illicit drug manufacturing is the large profits earned from this business. Opium profits help the traders get a hold of the things that are beyond the reach of earning by honest means; for example buying huge lands by deceiving the ones who acquired and have possessed it for generations. Even Adel's baba who is the savior and creator of Shadbagh-e-Nau and “had been handed an award for his humanitarian work” (Hosseini 243) seizes the rightful owners from their land and builds his own mansion in its place. It is a result of this opium trade that he is able to gain that enormity of respect and popularity because he is a major source of income to the village. Adel is extremely disturbed and horrified when he discovers the reality of his father

He saw for the first time his father's house for the monstrosity, the affront, the monument to injustice, that it privately was to everyone else. He saw in people's rush to please his father the intimidation, the fear, that was the real underpinning of their respect and deference... For the first time, Adel felt truly aware of the broader movements that had always governed his life. (Hosseini 274)

The power Adel's Baba has assumed has to be justified and this justification comes through relating his bad deeds as an act accomplished by the will of God. The wealth and luxuries he has accumulated, he says is a gift of God for all the sacrifices he has done in the name of Jihad- "God sees to it that those who sacrifice the most must justly reap the rewards as well" (Hosseini 242). Adel also comes to know how his mother Aria has accepted the situation inspite of knowing the fact that her husband is a drug lord. When asked by Adel if she regrets marrying his father she responds, "Look at our lives, Adel, she said slowly. Look around you" (Hosseini 253). She chooses to keep her son away from the true self of her husband- " He saw her struggles to keep from him all the things she knew, all the things she kept locked up, closed off, carefully guarded, like the two of them in this big house" (Hosseini 274). She seems to have accepted the luxury provided by the drug business her husband is into and chooses to live lavishly instead of questioning and going against her husband, even when she knows the impact of the drug business he is leading has on the people of the society.

The novel also describes the flow of income to Afghanistan from other countries, making it a dual economy and also emphasizing that Afghanistan will perish if America withdraws its share from the Afghan economy. The Afghan economy is heavily dependent on external support. The inflow of foreign capital is a major source that helps the poor people of Afghanistan to survive. Gholam reveals that his uncle Abdullah, his father's half-brother has been sending them money on monthly basis- "I have an uncle in America, my father's half-brother, Uncle Abdullah. I've never met him. But he was sending us money every few months. It helped. It helped a lot" (Hosseini 258). The inflow of income from America has made Afghanistan a crumpled country surviving on the help of other countries. Abdullah's wife Sultana tells their daughter Pari that his father had been sending money to his brother every three months: " She told me how, for years now, Baba had been sending this Iqbal-my half uncle, I thought with an inner lurch-a thousand dollars every three months, going down to Western Union, wiring the money to a bank in Peshawar" (Hosseini 375).

The social factors also influence the lives of the characters in ways that bring unexpected changes in their lives. The characters are spread all over the world but are connected by a single act that occurred fifty years ago- the selling of Pari. The society of Afghanistan is largely influenced by the religion predominant in the country that is Islam. In the fourth chapter of the novel that is

written in the voice of Nabi to Mr. Markos, we come across instances where religion plays a significant role in shaping the course of lives of the characters involved. Nabi has left his two sisters back home in the village of Shadbagh and works for the rich Mr. Suleiman Wahdati in Kabul as his chef and chauffeur. He confesses that he left his sisters in a hope to find a better life for himself

Consider it the first of my confessions, then, when I say that I felt stifled by the life I had in the village with my sisters, one of whom was an invalid. Not that it absolves me, but I was a young man, Mr. Markos, eager to take on the world, full of dreams, modest and vague as they may have been, and I pictured my youth ebbing away, my prospects increasingly truncated. So I left. To help provide for my sisters, yes, that is true. But also to escape. (Hosseini 75)

That he was able to escape, and his sisters left in the village alone, on their own, proves the weakening condition of women in the Afghan culture. His life in the city is more than he could have expected with “a bed and a chair, and enough room to unroll (his) prayer rug five times a day” (Hosseini 76). He is a celebrity when he goes back to his village to meet his sister and her family. When Nabi comes across Nila in the novel, he is taken aback, forgetting his position as a servant, he starts fantasizing his life with her. He also confesses of his desires being fulfilled at certain establishments that take care of young men’s needs. Here he compares the beauty he has seen earlier to that which he comes across when he meets Nila, “I mention this only to make the point that no whore I had ever lain with could compare with the beautiful, graceful creature who had just stepped out of the big house” (Hossein 80). The advantages of belonging to the male sex is clearly demonstrated here, for such an act, or maybe similar of its kind, if done by a female of the same stature would have been terribly condemned and abused in the same society under the same circumstances.

On the other hand Nila Wahdati is exposed to the elite society of the Afghanistan and unlike the typical Afghan women who are often denied of the freedom to raise their voice, she is the one breaking all the stereotypes of the Afghan woman in the veil. This aspect of cultural materialism where the theorists suggest breaking the shackles of the pre-conceived notions and ideals and rules of the society is applicable to Nila in the novel. When Nabi first sees her

She wore sunglasses and a short-sleeved tangerine-colored dress that fell short of the knees. Her legs were bare, and so were her feet... She rested the heel of one foot against the wall behind her and when she did, the hem of the dress pulled up slightly and thus revealed a bit of her thigh. (Hosseini 79)

Though her name and reputation in the society has been described as that of being of a loose character, yet she is able to secure herself a husband, a wealthy one, even though they both seldom know each other and could never love each other as is evident later in the novel. Nabi tells about the relationship between husband and wife to Mr. Markos,

Now I knew from the start that the marriage was an unhappy one. Rarely did I see a tender look pass between the couple or hear an affectionate word uttered. They were two people occupying the same house whose paths rarely seemed to intersect at all. (Hosseini 82)

As the society demands, Nila and Suleiman were living together just for the sake of it. They differed in their ideas and actions. The marriage did not seem to bring any change in their personalities. Mr. Suleiman “spent most of his days as he had before, reading in his upstairs study, doing his sketches, his daily routines more or less unaltered by the fact of marriage” (Hosseini 83-84). Whereas Nila on the other hand “wrote most days, either in the living room or else on the veranda, pencil in hand, sheets of paper spilling from her lap, and always the cigarettes” (Hosseini 84). The marriage took place for the very obvious reasons, Suleiman could not have answered people the reasons for his not getting married, and Nila’s father could not have answered people for her fallen character. The unequal marriage affects Nila more than it affects Suleiman. It disturbs her mentally of not being able to have a child and puts her into depression for days. Ranajit Guha says that: “It is a relationship of love that is an authentic instance of the primacy assumed by the male in sexual politics of a patriarchal society. This implies, among other things, the passivity of the female... and subjugation of her sexual passion” (Guha 48).

The marriage acts as a tool to suppress the desires of Nila, who in course of time breaks them instead. Once she is married, she cannot revel in the primrose path she used to enjoy before her marriage to Suleiman. Also, the relationship between Nila and her father deteriorates because of

her outgoing behavior and obstinate manners. She describes about their relationship in an interview for a French magazine Parallaxe:

There were strains between us. We were quarreling. Quite a lot, which was a novelty for him. He wasn't accustomed to being talked back to, certainly not by women. We had rows over what I wore, where I went, what I said, how I said it, who I said it to. I had turned bold and adventurous, and even more ascetic and emotionally austere. We had become natural opponents. (Hosseini 208)

The relationship between them is not of a usual kind. It becomes more violent when he comes to know of Nila's flings. She falls in love many times before marriage, much to her father's mortification and disagreement:

And then I took to falling in love. Often, desperately, and, to my father's horror, with the wrong sort. A housekeeper's son once, another time a low-level civil servant who handled some business affairs for my father. Foolhardy, wayward passions, all of them doomed from the start. (Hosseini 208)

This insult is unbearable for her father, whose friends would tell him about his daughters rendezvous. Her father is humiliated to the extreme, so much so that he uses his belt or fist to chasten her. Miller observes in his *Re-Imagining Cultural Studies* that "Social practices, not nature, genius, or individuality, make a way of life and change it over time" (Miller 5). The ethical code of conduct for women in Afghanistan affects her father's decision to give her any freedom but forces him to subdue Nila physically, mentally she could not be subdued. She thought that her father could terrorize [her] into submission" (Hosseini 209). In his introduction to *Society and Literature* Alan Sinfield says "The social identities so formed in recent history dominate our current perceptions" (Sinfield 1). Her father's anger rises because he is unable to relate Nila's identity with the prototypical Afghan woman identity. And this is when she starts writing poems, putting her "self" into them, full of eroticism, anger, passion and adolescence, much to the opposed views of the Afghan culture towards such kind of art. Her poems "defied tradition" (Hosseini 98). "She wrote about lovers whispering across pillows, touching each other. She wrote about pleasure" (Hosseini 98). She wrote about the suppression her father caused to her. In fact, she wrote about



everything she could not experience in totality, in reality. In the interview she gives to the French magazine *Parallaxe*, the interviewer observes a rebellion in her poems:

They [poems] are moving, rich with imagery, emotion, insight, and telling grace. They speak beautifully of loneliness and uncontainable sorrow. They chronicle her disappointments, the crests and troughs of young love in all its radiance and promises and trappings. And there is often a sense of transcendent claustrophobia, of a shortening horizon, and always a sense of struggle against the tyranny of circumstance- often depicted as a never named sinister male figure who looms. A not so-opaque illusion to her father, one would gather. (Hosseini 209)

This divergence to the path of writing poetry deluged with fervor and sensuality is a myth she creates for herself, a delusion she falls into that could help her escape from the extant norms of the society. Though defying of traditions and existing norms is her habit, but eventually she ends up bowing to the norms of the society by marrying a man much older to her.

The other part in the novel that clearly reflects upon the impact of the social traditions on the lives and decisions of the characters is described in chapter three where the relationship between the twin sisters Masooma and Parwana has been given with an essential emphasis. Parwana symbolizes the conflict of human nature- good and bad, though more of the bad side is seen on the first reading. Her jealousy towards Masooma develops since childhood. Even when they are kids, Parwana is the one who is more aggressive and more unlikeable by the people around: “Parwana was a tyrant. She exerted upon their mother the full force of her authority” (Hosseini 55). Masooma was more beautiful than her, more appreciated by people around and lesser a burden for their mother- “She cried only if in need of food or cleaning. When awake, she was playful, good humored, easily delighted, a swaddled bundle of giggles and happy squeaks. She liked to suck on her rattle” (Hosseini 55). Even the mother felt that Parwana is trying to take her life away from her. At one family gathering, when the girls were just ten months old, people around played with Masooma and admired her, ignoring her twin sister who was just there in her mother’s lap: “They marveled at her easy, sociable demeanor. They lifted her up and admired the pink flush of her cheeks, her sapphire blue eyes, the graceful curve of her brow, harbingers of the startling beauty that would mark her in a few years’ time” (Hosseini 56).

No one took notice of Parwana. Even when they are growing up, the jealousy between the sisters increases, as Masooma's beauty increases. Masooma was the attention taker. "She interrupted conversations midsentence, smokers mid-drag. She was the trembler of knees, the spiller of teacups" (Hosseini 63). Whereas Parwana felt herself to be the de trop sister: "A pathetic shadow, torn between her envy and the thrill of being seen with Masooma, sharing in the attention as a weed would, lapping up water meant for the lily upstream" (Hosseini 64). Alan Sinfield says in his *Cultural Politics-Queer Reading that* "Our subjectivities- the very idea that we have subjectivities- all this is constructed in ideology. Hence we recognize ourselves the kind of people ideology needs us to be" (Sinfield 24). Masooma has been made to believe by others that she is not beautiful. She sees herself through the eyes of other people. At every step in life, Parwana feels endowed with lesser of everything naturally and suffers obloquy for most part of her life. A feeling of being denied of what her sister had in abundance enroots in her very early in life. Most of the times, she hates her for the very fact that she has her as a sister. All her life, she suffers humiliation on comparison with her sister, disgraced that her sister was the one getting attention from everyone. All these factors help her develop animosity towards her own sister and escape from the very shadow of Masooma. Hosseini describes how Parwana tries to rescue herself from being hidden in her sister's reflection: "All her life, Parwana had made sure to avoid standing in front of a mirror with her sister. It robbed her of hope to see her face beside Masooma's, to see so plainly what she had been denied. But in public, every stranger's eye was a mirror. There was no escape" (Hosseini 64).

To inflate the hatred in their relationship Hosseini builds the narrative where Parwana loves the same man whom Masooma loves- Saboor. Saboor doesn't give any consideration to Parwana's feelings towards him, instead he falls for her sister Masooma. This again aggravates Parwana's hatred towards Masooma and when they are seventeen, sitting on a branch high up the oak tree, Masooma reveals that Saboor is going to ask their father about her hand in marriage. Grieved, panicked and shocked, Parwana pushes her sister down the branch, making her an invalid for the rest of her life. Before the accident took place Masooma always felt that "... her beauty was a weapon. A loaded gun, with the barrel pointed at her own head" (Hosseini 64). She could have never imagined that it will be her sister to shot her with that gun and make her half dead. It is Parwana who has to take care of her sister, day in and day out, not necessarily out of love but out

of a sense of duty she feels towards her sister and she realizes that this is the result of her own actions:

Parwana wants to howl but she forces herself into a weak smile. It takes strenuous effort at times like this to remember, to not lose sight of one unshakeable truth: This is her own handiwork, this mess. Nothing that has befallen her is unjust or undue. This is what she deserve. (Hosseini 51)

The more she had wanted to escape her sister, the more she gets anchored to her. This eventually makes Parwana hate her own sister. After their parents' death, Parwana has taken care of her sister for four years, all on her own, with only some financial help from their brother Nabi who left them to work in Kabul. She "feels constriction, despair, like a hand tightening inside her chest" (Hosseini 54). Masooma decides to let her sister have the life she has always wished for by asking her to marry Saboor and take care of his children and have their own. She realizes that her survival meant the unhappiness for both the sisters. She says, "I'm letting you go. I am releasing you" (Hosseini 68). Parwana's final choice to leave Masooma alone in the desert is a way to escape from all that she has faced till now. She chooses good times over her sister. As Marx said that men and women make their own history but not in the conditions of their own choosing. And so is evident when Parwana leaves her sister which is her own decision. She gives an overdose of opium to Masooma and leaves her alone in the desert. That is her only chance to live her life as she has wished for. She assures herself that all she has waited for in her life has come to her now, and she must not let it go.

Parwana keeps marching toward her new life. She keeps walking, the darkness around her like a mother's womb, and when it lifts, when she looks up in the dawn haze and catches a band of pale light from the east striking the side of a boulder, it feels like being born. (Hosseini 72)

Parwana decides to choose a better life, living with Saboor, the man she has loved since childhood, instead of living with her sister who is an ailing invalid. This decision must have been difficult to think and embark on but eventually she decides to give in. Saboor on the other hand is burdened after his first wife's death – "There is a weight over Saboor these days, a pall of tragedy,

a dead wife and two motherless children, one an infant” (Hosseini 53). He decides to marry Parwana in order to provide a mother to his two children. Though she tries sometimes to help the children and take care of them as a mother does, she seldom succeeds in the task. She loves her own children more. Towards Pari and Abdullah, her role is insufficient as a mother. As Abdullah notices-

But these were gestures, Abdullah knew, acts of duty, drawn from a well shallower than the one she reached into for Iqbal. If one night their house caught fire, Abdullah knew without doubt which child Parwana would grab rushing out. She would not think twice. In the end, it came down to a simple thing: They weren't her children, he and Pari. Most people loved their own. It couldn't be helped that he and his sister didn't belong to her. They were another woman's leftovers. (Hosseini 22)

Her preference for her own child is natural but overly biased because she forgets the reason why Saboor had married her and instead she is rarely concerned for Pari and Abdullah. She does not care to reflect over the situation when Saboor decides to give away Pari. She seems to be an accomplice in his decision of parting away with Pari because it is for her son Iqbal that he decides to sell Pari.

Hosseini also weaves into the novel the relationship between Nila and her adopted daughter Pari when they move to Paris. Nila, now free from the societal pressures of the country she earlier lived in, takes on drinking and loving extensively. She falls in love with a man named Julien when Pari is fourteen years old. The author again repeats the love of two women for the same man, earlier it was Parwana and Masooma. Their love for the same man had caused Parwana to abandon her sister. Fourteen years later, Nila and Pari go through the same tale- falling for the same man Julien. Nila sensed Julien's fondness for Pari and broke off with him. And she had “done so more as a jealous lover than a protective mother” (Hosseini 205). Ten years later, Pari meets Julien again and a few weeks later they find themselves sharing the same apartment. This incident make Nila hate her daughter and Nila abandons Pari. She is ashamed of her. She tells Pari: “I look at you sometimes and I don't see me in you. Of course I don't. I suppose that isn't unexpected, after all. I don't know what kind of person you are, Pari. I don't know who you are, what you're capable of, in your blood. You're a stranger to me” (Hosseini 206).

Nila never reveals to Pari that she is not her biological daughter, neither does she ever tell her of her original parents, her brother Abdullah or step uncle Nabi. She keeps her aloof of her origins, of where she came from:

What Pari had always wanted from her mother was the glue to bond together her loose, disjointed scraps of memory, to turn them into some sort of cohesive narrative. But Maman never said much. She always withheld details of her life and of their life together in Kabul. She kept Pari at a remove from their shared past, and, eventually, Pari stopped asking. (Hosseini 218)

Even Pari knew that her “fling with Julien had been the final push for Maman” (Hosseini 217). Out of jealousy and unacceptance of truth, Nila had turned her back on her daughter and later commits suicide in 1974. Pari feels this as the final abandonment of her mother, that her suicide was a way of leaving Pari alone in the world. Later Pari marries a man named Eric Lacombe who was drama teacher at a lycée. She has three children with him: Isabelle, Alain and Thierry. She never tells her children about Nila’s suicide. She feels it unsafe that a mother should tell her children that their parents can at any time abandon them: “She will not plant the seed in their mind, that a person is capable of abandoning her children, of saying to them *You are not enough*” (Hosseini 230).

The relationship between Nabi and Suleiman has been described by Hosseini, though in a very subtle manner that at a first glance it is difficult to assimilate their relationship, given the context of the country such as Afghanistan with a strict moral code that is deemed to be compulsory for its citizens to follow and adhere to. The Islamic law strictly condemns homosexuality and considers it as serious and heinous crime. The culprits can face death penalty. In this context, the relationship between Nabi and Suleiman has been shown in *And the Mountains Echoed* which develops, initially as a servant-chauffeur relationship and later develops into a stronger and undeniably a relationship where they both act as wife and husband. Nabi is recruited by Suleiman as a full-time worker. Being in close proximity to Suleiman, Nabi easily gets to know about the daily routine and habits of Suleiman but he is unable to make out for the reasons of his oddity. Nabi acts as a companion to Suleiman before his marriage- “He disliked walking alone, however, and thus [Nabi] was expected to accompany him” (Hosseini 76). Even after Suleiman gets married, his behavior does not change.

The inclusion of a wife in his life does not affect him. Nabi observes of their marriage: “Now, I knew from the start that the marriage was an unhappy one. Rarely did I see a tender look pass between the couple or hear an affectionate word uttered. They were two people occupying the same house whose paths rarely seemed to intersect at all” (Hosseini 82).

The relationship between Suleiman and Nila remains the same as it could have been had they not married. When they decide to adopt Pari, their parental selves are manifested in the best possible way. The Wahdati family “resembled a proper family” (Hosseini 103) as an effect of Pari’s entrance. Pari consumed most of their time and brought Nila and Suleiman together. In the spring of 1955, Suleiman suffers from an attack and it is then that Nila decides to leave her husband’s house with her daughter Pari to Paris. This incident throws all the responsibility and care-taking of the sick Suleiman on Nabi, who performs the duty very honestly. In Nila’s absence, Nabi acts as a companion to Suleiman. He takes care of his daily chores, cooks for him, takes him for the evening walks, and maintains his house but he is unaware of the fact that Suleiman loves him. He comes to know of this only when once he is cleaning Suleiman’s large closet and comes across his sketchbooks and finds the only subject portrayed in those to be himself. He is shocked when he goes through the pages of the sketchbooks:

The pages flipped before my eyes, each fanning my face with a little sigh, each bearing the same subject drawn in charcoal. Here I was wiping the front fender of the car seen from the perch of the upstairs bedroom. Here I was leaning on a shovel by the veranda. I could be found on these pages tying my shoelaces, chopping wood, watering bushes, pouring tea from the kettles, praying, napping. (Hosseini 113)

This is when he comes to know of the reason the relationship between Mr. Wahdati and Nila never developed. He remembers what Nila told him when she was leaving the house- “*It was you, Nabi. It was always you. Didn’t you know?*” (Hosseini 113). Nabi is astounded at this discovery but he decides to stay with Mr. Wahdati. He could not leave him in such a helpless state, sick and broken. In the later years Suleiman confesses to Nabi that he had been a “spectacularly bad cook” and a rash driver initially but he still hired him because of his own liking towards him. He tells him the reason- “Because you walked in, and I thought to myself that I had never seen anyone as beautiful” (Hosseini 119). He satisfies himself by just being in close proximity to Nabi because the

strict moral code of Afghanistan could not have allowed him to openly confess his state. He further tells that

I knew when I met you that we weren't the same, you and I, that it was an impossible thing what I wanted. Still, we had our morning walks, and our drives, and I won't say that was enough for me but it was better than not being with you. I learned to make do with your proximity. (Hosseini 119)

The love that Mr. Wahdati has for Nabi remains inside the four walls of the house. The restrictions of the society does not let the relationship to evince and flourish. Though initially Nabi is utterly bewildered at this discovery but later on, they behave as husband and wife. Nabi discloses the existing relationship to Mr. Markos when he says, "In that time, we had developed between us an unspoken language born of familiarity and routine, and, inevitably, a degree of previously unthinkable informality had seeped into our relationship" (Hosseini 116). They come in close approximation to each other and "argued the way married couples do, stubbornly, heatedly, and over trivial things" (Hosseini 123). Terry Eagleton in the foreword to *Radical Tragedy* by Jonathan Dollimore says that: "No ideology in human history has been more persuasive and persistent than religion, a symbolic form which links the minutiae of everyday conduct to the most ultimate of spiritual realities, and it is hard to see that any ideology ever will be" (Eagleton xii).

Religion acts as an impediment in not letting Suleiman accept his sexual orientation freely because of his fear of social ignominy. The politics of religion does not allow this because of the unproductivity of homosexual relationships and their non-existence in the alleviation of the economic parameters of the country. The attitude of the society about the inefficaciousness of homosexuals makes them reject the idea of accepting it publically.

*And the Mountains Echoed* depicts how the forces of economy and society force an individual to bound himself and these shackles also lead a man to escape into self-made delusions and myths. The inability to break the commonly accepted beliefs and notions paralyzes a man and makes his life a living burden for himself. Many characters in the novel are trying to escape from these shackles, some are able to and others are left to believe that "this is life now" (Hosseini 23).

## Conclusion

In this novel *And the Mountains Echoed* where the lives of the characters are being accustomed by the forces around them- both social and economic, Hosseini reveals the lives of people in Afghanistan traumatized by the circumstances in the country. The novel comes to an end with the eventual meeting of Pari and Abdullah, after years of separation. Though Abdullah, like Baba Ayub had forgotten his son Qais, has forgotten his sister, but there are instances when he has slight hints that Pari is related is a part of him. In the nine chapters that follow the voice of different characters and life seen from their point of view, there develops a story that begins from a single act of selling a daughter but travels throughout the world from Afghanistan to India, Pakistan, Tinos, United States and Paris. The vast number of characters in the novel have given the heterogeneity to the novel. As opposed to his previous novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* which specifically talk on issues like class distinction in Afghanistan, the impact of Taliban on the citizens and the suppression of females, *And the Mountains Echoed* communicates to its readers almost all the issues affecting Afghanistan like poverty, class distinction, female subjugation, opium business, Taliban and Soviet Invasion, the dual economy of Afghanistan and the issue of Afghan expatriates. To describe the scenario of the country in the words of Idris, it is “A thousand tragedies per square mile” (Hosseini 163).

Hosseini has been considered a master storyteller and he has skillfully written this novel, exhibiting his country in all aspects. He has made use of folktales, myths and songs in the novel to enhance the believability and engross the reader in the novel. The narrative shifts from first person to the second and also to the voice of the omniscient narrator. The first chapter of the novel with the folktale of the div and Baba Ayub is a clear demonstration of the situation of Afghans in their own country and in foreign countries. Throughout the novel the myths and delusions are apparent. The feathers that Abdullah collects for his sister Pari symbolize his view of giving Pari the freedom that birds have. But instead she is parted away from her brother and caged in another environment, to which she then becomes accustomed to. The sensual poetry of Nila is her way of escaping the unpleasant realities of life and secluding herself into a world not accepted by the Afghan society.



The element of escapism is prevalent throughout the novel. Most of the characters escape from their current environments and indulge themselves in different occupations in different countries. Mr. Markos leaves his homeland to travel to different parts of the world and eventually to Kabul in Afghanistan. Madaline escapes from the responsibility of her severely bruised daughter and goes to Athens to become a successful actress. Markos later realizes that he has much in common with Madaline. They had both created their own rescue. He says: "...that we weren't even that different, she and I. Hadn't we both yearned for escape, reinvention, new identities? Hadn't we each, in the end, unmoored ourselves by cutting loose the anchors that weighed us down?" (Hosseini 328)

They both had pulled themselves out from their existing lives and deviated on different paths. The worlds created by them strikingly contrast the worlds they had been born, raised up in. Thalia decides to stay on the island with Marko's mother Odelia. She refuses a private education in London that would have given her a chance of becoming a researcher, a scientist, a professor or an inventor. Markos comes to know the reason for this years later:

I learned that the world didn't see the inside of you, that it didn't care a whit about the hopes and dreams, and sorrows, that lay masked by skin and bone. It was as simple, as absurd, and as cruel as that... Beauty is an enormous, unmerited gift given randomly, stupidly. (Hosseini 329-330)

Hosseini reveals in *And the Mountains Echoed* that familial relationships are built on the economic and the norms of society. In some cases, the characters are breaking these norms and setting their own standards, without any consideration of the society. But largely, according to Raymond Williams, relationships are constructed on the basis of socio-economic determinants. In his *The Long Revolution* (1961), he says

It is clear that the reaction against exclusive political and economic social thinking can go too far. The system of decision is clearly crucial: it can quite literally be the life and death of a society [...] The truth about a society, it would seem, is to be found in the actual relations, always exceptionally complicated, between the systems of decision, the system of communication and learning, the system of maintenance and the system of generation and nurture [...] Thus, in certain societies, the family is also a directly economic organisation, and

its system of decision covers a wide area of activity. Here the relationships between persons will be of a complex yet quite unified kind, in that every person is involved with every other in more than one type of activity. (*The Long Revolution* 135-136)

Thus, it is entirely impossible for a family to survive in unfavorable economic and social conditions, these factors are responsible for weaken the familial bonds, and in extreme cases, separate them. This happens often in the novel, where characters are distanced from their families in order to secure themselves a better life. Nabi, Parwana, Nila, Pari and the Bashiri family are examples of those characters who are evading their prevalent and difficult ways of life for a more secured life style.

*And the Mountains Echoed* also depicts how certain relationships are least affected by the social and economic factors and are solely based on love. The relationship between Pari and Abdullah, Thalia and Odelia. These relationships depict the fault lines of cultural materialism. Such relations are devoid of any effect of the notions of the society. When Madaline leaves Thalia in the care of Odelia, she asks her to unveil her face and live life according to her own standards. She tells Thalia –“...I want you to know that you don’t have to wear that thing in this house anymore. Not on my account. Do it only if it suits you” (Hosseini 322). She unburdens Thalia from the life her mother had forced her into. She lets her have the courage to face and create her own identity. Also, the relationship between Markos and his mother Odelia, when Markos is a child, is not like other mother son relationships. She had never held his hand while walking, never kissed him good night or read bedtime stories. When Markos decides to leave his homeland and go to Kabul to work as a surgeon, she accepts his decision and later tells him that she is proud of him. This is when Markos realizes the one truth that had been overburdened by her lack of show of affection for her son. He had been blind to that truth: “It was this: that my mother would never leave me. This was her gift to me, the ironclad knowledge that she would never do to me what Madaline had done to Thalia. She was my mother and she would not leave me. This I had simply accepted and expected” (Hosseini 343).

There are certain characters in the novel breaking the shackles of economy and social hindrances and achieving their aims. For instance, the girl Roshana whom Idris and Timur meet in a Kabul Hospital was once promised by Idris for her treatment about which he seldom cares once he goes

back to America. But Roshana probably got treated of her injury and got a surgery done by Mr. Markos. She then rises a position of a writer and the first of her novels is about her own life. About Idris. At the moment when he is standing in the line to get his copy of the novel autographed by Roshana, he is worried that now everyone will come to know about his reality. But Roshana comforts him by writing in his copy a note that says- “*Don't worry. You're not in it*” (Hosseini 173). This act of charity Roshana does for Idris must have had come from the side of Idris years before. In this case, Roshana breaks the notions of those people who considered her no more than a zoo animal and is able to make for herself an identity.

The novel is an exemplifying portrayal of Afghanistan written by a writer of the same origin and therefore it gives us a reliable picture of this worn-torn country. Little research has been done on the novel. The present research is a mere starting point in studying the novel from the cultural materialist angle. The future scope of study for the novel is vast and can lead into varied insights into the Afghan culture and the problems faced and lives lived by its inhabitants and also those who have left the country and migrated to other parts of the world. Christopher Prendergast says in his *Cultural Materialism*:

A culture in common, in our own day, will not be the simple all-in-all society of old dream. It will be a very complex organisation, requiring continual adjustment and redrawing. At root, the feeling of solidarity is the only conceivable element of stabilization in so difficult an organisation. But in its issue it will have to be continually redefined, and there will be many attempts to enlist old feelings in the service of an emerging sectional interest. (Prendergast 26)

So in order to improve its economic and social order the existing patters have to be modified and redefined. The old structures have to be reformed and the new ones accepted. The socio-economic profile of Afghanistan has its influences echoing in the lives of characters throughout the novel and through this Hosseini depicts the lives of people in his native country, a country which has faced decades of war, and economic and political instability. *And the Mountains Echoed* has a vast number of characters and through them we come to know of the various voices from different situations but all linked together to each other. Hosseini has left the stories open ended and free for

reader's judgment which also allows the reader's unheard voice to take its own view of the decisions taken by the characters and how far they have left their impact echoing in our lives.

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