

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

According to Marwat (1997) in *Ethnic Factor in Afghanistan* (2012) by Muhammad Saleem Mazhar et al., Afghanistan is a country that is placed in a strategic position as the center of four ecological, cultural, and strategic areas, that is the Middle East, Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and the Far East, for the Pamir Mountains intrude into Chinese Sinkiang. Afghanistan possesses multi-ethnic groups which speak many different languages with multi-layered identity (Shahrani, 2002). Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks are the four major ethnic groups in this country. The distinction between each ethnicity could be seen through their language, religion, or race.

Afghanistan is well-known as a country that is close to war and conflict from foreign invasions, civil wars, interethnic conflicts until religious extremism (Mohammed Nasim, 2020). The foreign domination in Afghanistan by the British and Soviet, leads some ethnic groups to rebel and even create a civil war since each group wants to be more dominant than others. One of the results is the emergence of the Taliban's domination that has led Afghanistan into the darkest time. Cited from Farhoumand-Sims (2007) in *Being a Woman under Taliban's Theocratic Regime* by Stavroula Kristina Kallini (2021), the emergence of Taliban that took control of Afghanistan have implemented a theocratic regime based on their own

interpretation of Qur'an. They used the name of Islam to rule people but in fact it was a perversion that is contradictory to the value of Islam itself with all the severity they did.

Farhoumand-Sims (2007) also explains that Afghan people suffered a lot by the violation of the human rights that Taliban did, especially women who became the target of Taliban's political action. In Afghanistan, women are likely to be the object of violence such as domestic violence by both husbands and mothers-in-law (Jewkes et al., 2019), and also rape by strangers, forced marriage, forced prostitution, body mutilation, and honor killings (Ahmad & Avoine, 2016; Gibbs et al., 2019; Mannell et al., 2018).

Under the Taliban, women's roles in society were too restricted since women were almost totally banned from public activities. US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2001) states that the Taliban has a different way from the Islamic community as a whole in interpreting Islam. They believe that all the laws that they establish have aims of protecting women's role and position, but in fact the women's rights to health, education, work, and religion are deprived (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2001).

Skaine (2002), as cited in *Women in Afghanistan* by Mohammed Nasim Ratib Zeidan (2020), states that one of the Taliban's rules upon women is forbidding them to attend school or university thus 90 percent of girls didn't go to school in January 2000. This new rule led women in Herat to come against this but only violence that they received from the Taliban military (Emadi, 2002). Goodson (2001) as cited in *Being a Woman under*

*Taliban's Theocratic Regime* by Stavroula Kristina Kallini (2021) states that Taliban believes that school is inappropriate for girls because it is not supported by the Quran or the Islamic law of Sharia, in which practically Taliban implemented their own interpretation of Qur'an and Sunnah in creating a law for society. Thus girls are only allowed to learn Quran, starting from the age of eight, and not allowed to access modern education. Taliban also forces women to quit their jobs and it leads them to be street beggars or even doing prostitution (Skaine, 2003; De Leede, 2014).

Beside that, women were also restricted by forbidding to go outside without wearing burqa – a full head to toe covering clothes for women – and without being accompanied by husband or a male relative (Skaine, 2002). The Taliban also instructs people to paint their window black in order to prevent people from seeing women inside (FarhoumandSims, 2007). Women are forbidden from wearing specific clothes and jewelry too (Goodson in Kallini, 2021) . As the consequence, Mukherjea (2021) explains that Amnesty International documents an incident of a young girl's finger being amputated by the Taliban's law due to doing manicure.

Women were also forbidden to be treated by a male doctor. Even though a few female doctors and nurses were still allowed to practice in some of Kabul's hospitals, it didn't guarantee the adequate health services for women (Skaine, 2002). In addition, Zoya et al. (2002) in Kallini (2021) argues that according to the Taliban's belief system, "if a woman was sick, it was better for her to die than to be treated by a man. If she refuses male doctor to touch her, she would be certain of going to Heaven. If she let

herself be treated by him, she would be condemned to Hell". It shows that the Taliban's belief is too strict and couldn't be more flexible for any situation because Islam indeed orders women to not be touched by men other than their *mahram*, but it can be otherwise in a certain situation like in medical treatment.

The reign of Taliban was really oppressing women's position in Afghanistan. Women's roles in society were limited and women's rights were deprived. The patriarchal culture that is really dominant in Afghanistan makes women really subordinate and powerless. Many literary works that raise issues of gender inequalities and repression that are experienced by women in Afghanistan have a role to help voice women's rights and resist gender inequality. The examples of the literary works that raise this issue are a novel by Khaled Hosseini entitled *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis, which will be the corpus of this research.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* was written in 2007 and is well-known as the breathtaking novel by Hosseini, the author of the internationally best-selling novel "The Kite Runner". This work is a suspenseful epic that tells the life struggle of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila, in the midst of the tension and instability of Afghanistan society. They suffer many tragedies due to political circumstance and custom, the Soviet war, Afghan civil war, and the extremist Taliban faction. This situation is worsened by the brutality of their husband and it makes them struggle to protect their own selves.

In this novel, women are portrayed as being oppressed and objects of violence. This novel gives a portrayal of how miserable life was for Afghan women in that certain era. Khaled Hosseini presents deeply moving stories as the representation of the feelings and thoughts of Afghan women to leave the readers with some sense of compassion and empathy for those who suffer such a condition.

Cited from achievement.org, Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. He is the oldest of five children in his family. He spent his childhood in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. His family lived in Wazir Akbar Khan district, which has a cultivated and cosmopolitan atmosphere. In that place, women lived and worked as equals with men. His father worked for the foreign ministry and his mother is a teacher who taught Persian literature.

The years in which Hosseini lived in Kabul is when the 200-year-old Afghan monarchy was overthrown in 1973. Then Daoud Khan, the king's cousin, proclaimed himself as the president of the new republic. However, in the following years, the instability began. As in the early 1970 his father was posted to Afghanistan's embassy in Tehran, Iran, Hosseini then left Kabul. Hosseini enlarged his knowledge of the classical Persian literary tradition that Iran and Afghanistan share. After that, in 1976 Hosseini's family had to move again since his father was assigned to the embassy in Paris, France.

Two years after Hosseini moved to Paris, the government of Afghanistan was overthrown by the communist faction. They killed Daoud

Khan and his family. Hosseini's family still hoped that they might return to Afghanistan. However, in December 1979 when the Soviet Army entered Afghanistan to reinstate their communist allies, Hosseinis were still in France. Then the Hosseinis applied for political asylum in the United States.

At the age of 15, Hosseini arrived in San Jose, California in the fall of 1980. To fulfill family needs, his father ran a flea market stall alongside fellow Afghan refugees. Hosseini also struggled with English when he studied in the United States. However, his fondness of literature endeavored him until he began to write stories in English. His family condition improved since his father worked as a driving instructor. However, Hosseini desired a better life for himself and his family and wanted to succeed in the new country. Thus, Hosseini started to study biology at Santa Clara University and medicine at the University of California. Then Hosseini married a woman named Roya and decided to return to Northern California to be nearer to their families.

Hosseini spent his spare time during his medical studies by writing short stories. Even though his life in a new country has been affluent, he still thought about his homeland which is still in distress. The condition in 1998 of Afghanistan is under control of the extremist Taliban faction. Taliban was a group that imposed brutal theocratic rules and provided a base for anti-Western terrorists. And to make matters worse, this regime eliminated women's rights and along with all foreign art and culture.

In 2001, eventually he decided to tell the world about something he knew in his life and expanded his stories into a novel. He finished the tale

of two boys which tells about the childhood friendship that was separated by the war. This novel has the title of *The Kite Runner* that was released in 2003 with publisher Riverhead Books, a division of the Penguin Group. *The Kite Runner* spent more than two years on *The New York Times* bestseller list. More than 12 million copies were sold and it was published in more than 40 languages.

After the success of his book, for the first time in 27 years, Hosseini returned to Afghanistan. Afghanistan has changed and is very different from the last time he lived there. The war has devastated the city and countrymen have suffered many terrible tragedies. Ever since his visit to Afghanistan in 2003, Hosseini had been working on his second novel. In this time, he focused on the women's experiences during pre-war Afghanistan, Soviet occupation, civil war, and the Taliban dictatorship.

This second novel was a remarkable work entitled *A Thousand Splendid Suns* that was published in 2007. The title was inspired by a poem by the 17th-century Persian poet named Saib-e-Tabrizi. The idea of this novel came from his return to Kabul in 2003 when he saw some fully covered women walking along with their children. This led Hosseini to think '*Who is that person inside? What has she endured? What makes her happy? What gives her sorrow? What are her hopes, her longings, her disappointments?*' And this novel was created as an attempt to imagine those questions.

It became a massive international phenomenon and entered the bestseller lists shortly after it was published. The paperback edition of *A*

*Thousand Splendid Suns* spent more than two years on the *New York Times* bestseller list. His third novel is *And the Mountain Echoed* that was published in 2013. This novel presents the hardships of two siblings and their family circumstances. Then in 2018, Hosseini published his new work entitled *Sea Prayer*.

Moving to the second novel, that is *The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis that was published in 2001. This novel tells about an Afghan girl who disguised as a boy to be the breadwinner of her family since her father was arrested by the Taliban and girls or women weren't allowed to go outside alone. Cited from prabook.com and deborahellis.com, Deborah Ellis was born on August 8, 1960, in Cochrane, Ontario, Canada to an office manager Keith Ellis and a nurse Betty Daugherty Ellis. She is well-known as an award-winning author, a feminist and a peace activist. She focuses on advocating the peace and anti-war movement.

Her works mostly concern children literature, such as the best-known of her *The Breadwinner Trilogy* that depicts the plight and struggle of children in developing countries. She creates her work based on her interviews during her travel to Pakistan in 1997 to the Afghan refugees. This great series includes *The Breadwinner* (2001), *Parvana's Journey* (2002), *Mud City* (2003), and *My Name is Parvana* (2011). Even in 2017, *The Breadwinner* was adapted into an animated film.

Cited from bookbrowse.com of Deborah Ellis' bibliography, Deborah's works mostly come from her experience, either fiction and non-fiction. She has done many memorable journeys, like her experience in



Pakistan to help refugees at an Afghan Refugee Camp, her journey in Israel and the Gaza Strip to understand the condition of Israeli and Palestinian children, and when she spends time with children orphaned by AIDS in Malawi and Tanzania. From all her experiences, she creates her books either fiction or non-fiction to show her support for children and peace.

Currently, she has more than thirty books to her credit including *Looking for X* (1999), *The Heaven Shop* (2004), *I Am a Taxi* (2006), *Moon at Nine* (2014) and many others. She has won many awards, such as the Governor General's Literary Award, the Ruth Schwartz Award, the Middle East Book Award, Sweden's Peter Pan Prize, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award and the Vicky Metcalf Award for a Body of Work. Beside these awards, she also receives the Ontario Library Association's President's Award for Exceptional Achievement and has been named to the Order of Canada.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Breadwinner* are an amazing work from a great author. These novels give readers the portrayal of Afghan women's condition under the Afghan society. Both novels depict Afghan society very well since their novels have a lot of images or representation regarding life in Afghanistan and its complex religious, social, and political history. Many good studies about *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Breadwinner* have been done by researchers.

The examples of previous studies of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* comes from Aneeta Sebastian in *Feminine Power as Represented in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2016). The purpose of this study is

analyzing the psyche and lives of the female characters of the novel who are voiceless, living under the clutches of patriarchy, religion, and politics. It also examines how the notion of Feminist Sisterhood had been used in liberating the chained female characters in the fiction. Then, in 2017 there is a study from Muhammad Imran Joyia et al. entitled *Courageous Women: A Study of Resilience of Women in Khaled Hosseini's Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns* which aims to assess the character's attitudes and opinion regarding what the characters act and they are forced to act by using the theory of subalternity by Gramsci and Spivak.

There is also another article entitled *A Legitimate End to Illegitimate Beginning: A Critical Analysis of Mariam's Character in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2017)* by Samina Akhtar et al. which focuses on examining Mariam's endurance, struggles and resistance in her strenuous journey to attain a legitimate ending. The feminist literary criticism is used to analyze the text. Next is an article from Ayesha Munir, Muhammad Iqbal Butt, and Anab Shabbir entitled *Investigating the Concept of Misogyny in A Thousand Splendid Suns: A Feminist Perspective (2020)*. This study aims to examine the concept of misogyny and the status of women by applying a qualitative research methodology, three-dimensional model of Fairclough and feminist critical discourse analysis.

In addition, Ahmad Misuari Gibran, M. Amir, and Herawaty Abbas do a study about *The Negative Impacts of the Cultural Ban and Oppression of Human Rights on the Afghan's Psychological Condition in Khaled Hosseini's Novels The Kite Runner and A Thousand Splendid Suns (2022)*

which purposes to investigate the impacts of the cultural ban and the violation of human rights on the characters' psychological condition by applying a qualitative method and psychoanalysis theory. Moreover, there is also a study by Shahjahan Kabir (2022) with title *The Overshadowing Presence of Toxic Masculinity and A Call for Reducing Sexism in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns* has aim to analyzing the consequences of toxic masculinity in the characters' personal, familial, and social life through the male characters who suffer the stereotyped notion of gender roles of real men. This study is qualitative research which focuses on the victimized condition of men whose sufferings are often unnoticed by the society.

Besides those *A Thousand Splendid Suns* previous studies, the examples of previous studies of Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner* come from Erni Suparti entitled *Reconstructing Patriarchal Dominations and Gender Roles in Deborah Ellis and Rukhsana Khan Works* (2015) which aims to explore three novels (*The Breadwinner*, *Parvana's Journey*, and *Wanting Mor*) regarding the portrayal of women against the system of patriarchy in Afghanistan and examine how the effect of war and violence may change the understanding of gender roles that influence the lives of many women in Afghanistan. The second one is *Parvana's Struggles Against Gender Inequality in Taliban Society in Deborah Ellis' The Breadwinner: A Feminist Children's Literature Study* (2015), an article by Endah Ratnasari that analyzes three aspects: the harms that gender inequality puts on female children in Taliban society, Parvana's struggles against gender inequality in

Taliban society, and the significant meanings of Parvana's struggles in Taliban society.

The third previous study is *Character and Moral Values in the Novel of "The Breadwinner" by Deborah Ellis (2018)* by Fahrudin. This study aims to find out the moral values from the characters of the novel by using qualitative-descriptive analysis. The fourth article is *The Study of Gender Inequality Found in Deborah Ellis's Novel "The Breadwinner"* (2019) by Santi Prastiyowati, Thathit Manon Andini, and Willia Prastiwi which analyzes the topic of gender inequality experienced by the main character of "The Breadwinner" novel and its effects on her.

The fifth previous study is an article by Hasanain Ali Kareem and Fazel Asadi Amjad entitled *Human Oppression and Transformed Religion in Deborah Ellis' 'The Breadwinner'* (2020). This article has the purpose of examining the events and characters who practiced extremist policies against moderate people that implements the socio-religious framework to explain the impact of the transformation of religion to a "social cement" by extremists and the social and political deterioration. And then the next article is from Rushindar Apparao Dabhade entitled *Suffering of the Children During the Taliban Regime in Deborah Ellis' "The Breadwinner"* (2021) that examines the unbearable suffering experienced by the children in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime through "The Breadwinner" novel.

From the previous studies that discussed above, this research will be conducted on the title of "The Portrayal of Women in Afghan Society in

Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*". It focuses on analyzing and comparing both novels concerning the portrayal of women's condition and roles in Afghan society, where patriarchal culture does exist. This is very important since *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Breadwinner* is a novel set in Afghanistan as a country that is very rich in traditions, customs, and religious beliefs and a place where many conflicts occur that affect women too much. Throughout history, the position and roles of Afghan women was restricted in many aspects. They have been marginalized from society since their position is considered unequal with men. Thus women's rights were often being deprived especially in the time of war in Afghanistan. To analyze the condition of women in Afghanistan through the novels, the theory of Liberal Feminism by Mary Wollstonecraft and the concept of girl power will be used in this study.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. How do Afghan society treat women in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*?
2. How are the responses of female characters toward the treatments of Afghan society upon women in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*?
3. What are the similarities and differences between Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Deborah Ellis' *The Breadwinner*?

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to analyze:

1. The treatments of Afghan society upon women in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns and Deborah Ellis' The Breadwinner.
2. The responses of female characters toward the treatments of Afghan society upon women in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns and Deborah Ellis' The Breadwinner.
3. The similarities and differences between Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns and Deborah Ellis' The Breadwinner.

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on how Afghan society treats women and the women's responses toward it, which is portrayed in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns and Deborah Ellis' The Breadwinner. It will analyze the portrayal of Afghan women's position and women's empowerment by using the theory of liberal feminism and the concept of girl power. It will be analyzed through the narrations and utterances of the male and female characters in the novel.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to give a portrayal and explanation about women's condition in Afghan society especially about patriarchy culture that they experience. From this, may this study give us awareness about the condition of Afghan women and understand how women should be treated in the right way in the family and society. Hopefully this study will be useful as a reference about Afghan women, gender inequalities, patriarchal culture, and feminism.