

A Carnavalesque Exploration of Hosseini's Select Novels

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Abstract This study applies Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of carnivalesque to the select novels of Khaled Hosseini, namely, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*. The theoretical framework of carnivalesque is based on the chaotic festivities of carnivals, during which *reversal* is celebrated. The understanding of carnivalesque prepares grounds for a deeper investigation of subversive and rebellious tendencies in a literary work. This paper explores how carnivalesque moments manifest by creating space for alternative perspectives, challenging hierarchies, suspending societal norms, and celebrating grotesque bodies within these novels. This analysis provides instances of power reversal, dialogue among diverse voices, and defiance of societal expectations by unearthing the deeper layers of plot dynamics and the characters in the novels. The present study, ultimately, enhances the understanding of the intricate interaction of culture, power, and resistance in the select works of Khaled Hosseini through the lens of carnivalesque.

Keywords Mikhail Bakhtin; Carnavalesque; Khaled Hosseini; *The Kite Runner*; *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; *And the Mountains Echoed*; Subversion of Hierarchies

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Introduction

Mikhail Bakhtin is a Russian philosopher and theorist who propounded many unique concepts to decode and analyze the text in unique ways. Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony¹, heteroglossia², dialogism³ and carnivalesque help researchers discern the multiple layers of a text. These groundbreaking concepts of Bakhtin can have a unique impact on literary analysis. Out of these Bakhtinian intellectual tools, carnivalesque helps to understand subversive and reformatory tendencies of the voices and forces that often remain at the peripheries of society. Bakhtin propounded this critical concept, which has roots in the chaotic festive life of carnivals in Medieval Europe. Bakhtin observed that political, ideological, moral, and state authorial forces are subverted during carnival.

The spirit of carnival off-shoots a literary form of carnivalesque that allows for the momentary overturning of power positions in the textual universe. Dostoevsky's novels sparked Bakhtin's interest in carnivalized writings and later in the development of one of his key concepts, carnivalesque. Bakhtin introduced this concept in his work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. The thought of carnivalesque is further developed from the close reading and analysis of the 17th-century writer Rabelais and explained in detail in his seminal work, *Rabelais and His World*. Continuous exploration by researchers has refined the understanding of Bakhtinian theory of carnivalesque and it has been established that *reversal* is the fundamental idea at the core of it. Carnivalesque can be seen when a social space is built for the momentary exchange of positions. Bakhtin wrote that "carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (10).

As a literary analytical tool, Carnivalesque can help unpack scenarios of

1 Polyphony refers to the idea of having multiple voices in the text with different and contesting ideologies. These voices are not guided by the author or narrator. See more, Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. (C. Emerson, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

2 The concept of heteroglossia emphasizes diverse languages and discourses used in text and their connection to the social and cultural surroundings of the characters. See more Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press

3 The concept of dialogism highlights the continuous engagement of present utterances with all past and future utterances of the same context. See more Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.

inversion of societal norms, temporary suspension of hierarchical structures, and celebration of the grotesque. Elements of carnivalesque often highlight the power dynamics in a society that are depicted in the text. Through the carnivalesque lens, it can be understood how certain characters challenge traditional hierarchies and official systems. This analysis gives a closer view of the tension between dominant and marginalized groups and discloses the continuous complex play between control and resistance. During carnivalesque episodes, characters often embrace the spirit of liberation from societal constraints and reveal their hidden desires. The desire to attain personal joy can lead to breaking societal norms and expectations. Thus, the carnivalesque framework helps in dissecting a text to reach the deeper layers of the social, political, and psychological dimensions.

Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque as a framework is used widely to explore various literary works across the genres. This concept is used by Ayşenur to study the Turkish translation of Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, explaining the dual nature of the protagonist and how the desired freedom and equality hinged in the carnival setting (332-343). According to Ravi, Mabanckou's novel *Verre Cassé* incorporates carnivalesque humor through scatological imagery and informal language, building a conflicted utopic world for the black other (33-42). Nadal explained how Hitchcock's film adaptation of *Strangers on a Train* brings in carnival elements to represent the protagonists' mental turbulence through carnival as a reflection of their mental disorder (104-114). Hasibe applied Bakhtin's concept of carnival and grotesque realism to Iris Murdoch's novel *The Italian Girl*, surveying the reestablishment of characters through connections with the Other in society (757-764). According to Violeta, The novels *Johannisnacht* by Uwe Timm and *Lietuvis Vilniuje* by Herkus Kunčius incorporate carnivalization in the strategies adopted for narrative and worldview, rising above the cultural and literary boundaries (67-76). Susan examined carnivalesque by explaining how the author has recontextualized the traditional castaway narratives in Martel's *Life of Pi* and has shown the uncommon, nonhuman, and alternative ways of dealing with the world (1-9).

We have applied the Bakhtinian analytical tool of carnivalesque to analyze Khaled Hosseini's renowned novels *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And The Mountains Echoed* (2013). Through this analysis, carnivalesque tendencies infused in these novels will be discovered. Khaled Hosseini is an illustrious Afghan American novelist who is gifted with exceptional storytelling skills. The above-mentioned three novels of Hosseini resonate deeply with readers across the globe. The stories of these novels are woven

with multicolored threads of emotions in the backdrop of Afghan socio-cultural settings and political turmoil. This is why the novels become fertile grounds for scholarly academic analysis. The first and most acclaimed novel of Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, is the story of two friends and half-brothers, Amir and Hassan, who share a very complex relationship. The story is developed against the backdrop of political and social unrest in Afghanistan. The major themes in the novel are guilt, redemption, betrayal, loyalty and friendship. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* explores the themes of sacrifice, love, resilience, and the enduring power of women through the intertwining stories of Laila and Mariam, who are married to the same abusive husband, Rasheed. The story gives readers a very jolting experience as it presents some of the deepest human experiences and emotions. *And the Mountains Echoed* provides readers with a tapestry of colorful, interconnected stories that span across generations and continents. The story of the novel begins in Afghanistan in the 1950s and focuses on the lives of two siblings, Abdullah and Pari, who are separated due to the financial crises in the family. Many other characters and stories are also in some way connected to this main story. The novel explores themes like family, loss, sacrifice, and the intricate bonds that tie people together.

The novels of Khaled Hosseini have garnered significant attention from scholars who have analyzed them using various literary theories like post-colonialism, psychoanalysis, feminism, and subaltern studies etc. Various scholarly articles are written to offer insights into the intricate layers of which these novels are made up. Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* is explored for various themes and issues. Prakash, in his paper, focused on the portrayal of the Hazaras as a subaltern minority in Afghanistan who endure physical and psychological oppression from the dominant Pashtuns (100-106). Vishwa explored the concept of dehumanization, particularly in the conflict between the Pashtuns and Hazaras (84-92). Latha & Velusamy delve into the psychological transformations of the protagonist, Amir, and his journey toward redemption and reparation (621). Khanam et al. studied *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to focus on the sufferings of women in a patriarchal society, specifically in Afghanistan (110-122). Aziz et al. discuss the conflict and challenge between patriarchal and liberal feminist ideologies in *And the Mountains Echoed* (154-167). Inara et al. discuss how this novel challenges stereotypes about Afghanistan by exploring human destinies and characters (623-630).

This article will discuss the carnivalesque tendencies occurring in various forms in the novels of Hosseini. The carnivalesque exploration in this study is based on the carnival spirit of reversal, freedom and subversion. The first section talks

about the polyphonic settings in these novels where diverse voices are heard. In the multiplicity of voices, the dominating voices are often challenged by voices from weaker positions, as happens in a carnival atmosphere. The second section explains the subversion of hierarchies, where the characters perform some acts to jolt the positions of power. The third section focuses on instances in the novels where various characters are breaking society's set norms, expectations and rules to attain temporary liberties akin to carnival. The fourth section explains how grotesque bodies and exaggerated physicality are also carnivalesque and how this form of carnivalesque is meticulously incorporated into these texts. The carnivalesque lens has enabled us to surface the alternative truths presented by the weak voices, recognize the moments of subversion of hierarchies, identify the deviations from set patterns, and analyze the celebration of grotesque bodies. The dominating and oppressive structures are challenged temporarily in these novels by powerless characters. The carnivalesque further enriches the understanding of the complex interplay of culture, power and resistance. Thus, Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque becomes the guiding force for looking for the instances occurring in these novels that represent the momentary switching of power positions.

Polyphonic Carnavalesque

Bakhtin's carnivalesque is based on the idea of subversive forces that disrupt the oppressive system and challenge the established ideologies. Subversive forces thrive in polyphonic settings. "In the atmosphere of the 'carnival', there is no longer the voice of just one person, narrator, or character; henceforth, there is 'polyphony' in the sense that there are now several voices and different opinions" (Ayşenur et al. 337). The polyphonic novels provide space for all sorts of voices with multiple ideologies. As Bakhtin explained about Dostoevsky's works, there is "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 06). The inclusion of diverse voices helps in surfacing the alternative truths that are free from any authorial guidance. These voices contest the traditional power structures and rigid ideologies like patriarchy¹,

1 Patriarchy is the hypothetical social system in which the father or a male elder has absolute authority over the family group; by extension, one or more men (as in a council) exert absolute authority over the community as a whole. See more, Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, March 7). patriarchy. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/patriarchy>.

religious extremism¹ and societal expectations and suspend them temporarily by showing alternative perspectives. The suspension of these powerful voices creates a carnivalesque scenario where alternative perspectives, like feminist² and religious notions are expressed freely. By examining the diverse voices with contrasting perspectives through carnivalesque gives us the opportunity to understand forces that are ready to uproot the dominant ideologies. "In the 'carnavalesque' game of inverting official values, (...) the anticipation of another, utopian world in which anti-hierarchism, the relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted" (Lachmann 118).

The multiplicity of voices embroils in a constant struggle to take the central position and push the other voices to the periphery. "It creates a situation in which diverse voices are heard and interact, breaking down conventions and enabling genuine dialogue" (Robinson).

All three novels under discussion are polyphonic in nature because a range of diverse voices with a multiplicity of perspectives are incorporated here. Hosseini has created the characters in his novels to express their ideologies free from authorial clutches. Like, there are constant struggles among the voices loaded with the ideologies of the patriarchy and feminism and religion and religious extremism. In carnivalesque moments, the marginal voices become louder than the stronger ones. In this section, we try to explain the traditional and dominating voices, such as patriarchal ones, that occur in each of these novels and how feminist voices temporarily counter these robust voices. In the novel *The Kite Runner*, a strong voice with patriarchal ideologies is presented by protagonist Amir's father (Baba) on various occasions. Patriarchy unapologetically targets men and women by setting gender-specific norms. Baba targets his own son Amir for not being manly enough to safeguard himself from bullies. Baba expressed his disappointment for his son in these words; "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (Hosseini *Kite Runner* 20). Soraya was also targeted for

1 Religious extremism is a longstanding phenomenon that manifests in different forms. It is a concept that has been viewed as a high sense of ideological commitment that is expressed through certain actions that show deep loyalty to a belief system. It includes practices that characterize and define rituals and customs of many religious groups. . See more Njoku, E.T., Akintayo, J. (2018). Religious Extremism. In: Leeming, D. (eds) Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-27771-9_200132-2.

2 Feminism, the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. See more, Brunell, L. and Burkett, . Elinor (2024, February 28). feminism. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>.

eloping at a young age by her relatives. In *The Thousand Splendid Suns*, patriarchal voices come from characters like Rasheed and Khalil and the Taliban. Rasheed is the most vital ambassador of patriarchy. He believes in strict gender roles and criticizes the idea of modern society where women are free to follow their will and their husbands are supportive. He tells Mariam that women visit his shop without covering themselves properly, and what he despises the most is that their husbands don't object to that. All these things happen in Afghan society in the name of modernity. He tells Mariam that "it embarrasses me, frankly, to see a man who lost control of his wife" (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 69). He further affirms that he comes from a background where a single improper word or look of a woman can be the reason for spilling the blood and he declared arrogantly and authoritatively that "where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only" (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 69). In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Mrs. Neela Wahdati's father expresses a strong patriarchal ideology. Neela was rebellious and never succumbed to the pressure created by her father to follow the etiquette of a woman as desired by society. They often quarreled about Neela's behavior, which is quite scandalous for Afghan society. In Neela's own words, her father "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" (Hosseini *Mountain Echoed* 208). Krystyna Pomorska in the foreword of the book *Rebelais and His World*, notes that dialogue among various voices helps in surfacing the truth. "Dialogue so conceived is opposed to the "authoritarian word"(avtoritarnoe slovo) in the same way as carnival is opposed to official culture" (X).

In the polyphonic text, when strong voices support one sort of ideology, some contesting voices try to indulge in dialogue with them and bring in contrasting perspectives. These perspectives challenge the ideologies that are forwarded as official truths. In all these novels, if the patriarchal notion is expressed very strongly, then there is an alternative space created for feminist notions to counter patriarchal rants, though temporarily. Soraya in *The Kite Runner* criticizes how patriarchal society overlooks the deeds of men and ridicules women brutally for the same. In her words, men can behave in a reckless manner but not women; they can go to nightclubs and make their girlfriends pregnant, but if she does something of this sort, then she lacks morality, "Oh, they are men having fun ! I made one mistake and everyone is talking nang and namoos(Honor and Pride)" (Hosseini *Kite Runner* 156). In *Thousand Splendid Suns*, there are many feminist voices like Nana, Laila, the lady teacher, and Babi, who try to break away from the accepted norms of patriarchy. Nana, a poor mother of an illegitimate child abandoned by her husband,

voices out the anguish of a wretched woman who was outcasted and kept at the periphery of society. She criticizes the way society functions in powerful words. She tells her daughter not to overtrust any rich man, even her father. She says, “rich man telling rich lies” (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 5). She further tells from her own experience of being an outcaste that this male-dominated society would always find fault with a woman: “like a compass needle that points north, a man accusing finger always finds a woman” (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 07). Another character of a school teacher, fondly called Khala Rangmaal by kids, opposes the biases against women in society. She told her students, “Women and men were equal in every way, and there was no reason women should cover if men didn't” (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 111).

Similarly, Mrs. Neela Wahdati becomes the feminist voice in *And the Mountains Echoed* to unmask the face of patriarchy. She does everything that is considered impure and wrong for a woman in Afghan society to show her rebellion against the Patriarchal system. While talking about her father, she reveals how her own father disregarded her for not adhering to the set gender roles of the society. “We were quarrelling. 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 he even more ascetic and emotionally austere” (Hosseini *Mountain Echoed* 208). “No one in Kabul considered me a pioneer of anything but bad taste, debauchery, and immoral character. Not least of all, my father. He said my writing was the ramblings of a *whore*. He used that word precisely. He said I’d damaged his family name beyond repair” (Hosseini *Mountain Echoed* 211).

The contesting voices from the margins of society are occurring to silence the domineering voices. The anti-religious voice of Baba in *The Kite Runner* is doused by Rahim Khan by giving a religious explanation of heavenly mercy. Baba makes remarks about religion very candidly, “They do nothing but thumb their prayers beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don't even understand” (Hosseini *Kite Runner* 15). Baba uses words like “bearded idiots” and “self-righteous monkeys” for mullahs. This interpretation of religion is quite dominant in the novel. But on certain occasions, there is a religious voice that comes into the picture and overpowers all the anti-religious rants. The Religious extremism of the Taliban is countered by the true teachings of religion that are filled with mercy and forgiveness by Mullah Faizullah in *The Thousand Splendid Suns*. When Mariam was deeply sorrowful after the death of her mother and held herself responsible for the death. That time, Mullah Faizullah, who was constantly telling the positive side of religion

to Mariam, soothes her wound by saying, "The Koran speaks the truth, my girl. Behind every trial and every sorrow that He makes us shoulder, God has a reason" (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 38). All these challenging voices are occurring from a weaker position.

The Temporary occurrence of counter perspectives to challenge the dominating ideas generates a carnivalesque scenario as Bakhtin explained that, carnivalesque is a way of challenging the established notions and creating the space for alternative voices to show up, though momentarily. There is a constant fight between official and non-official to establish the alternative truth. These battling voices try to subvert the established notions in the textual universe of Hosseini with the celebratory spirit of carnivalesque.

Overturning of Hierarchies

Bakhtinian carnivalesque is an umbrella term that can be understood in multiple ways. Denith observed that "carnavalesque has no one univocal social or political meaning, but that it provides a malleable space, in which activities and symbols can be inflected in different directions" (173). In the novel, one can look at the situation where carnivalesque can occur contextually when a very feeble character with an almost silenced voice says something very important or contradicts the authority.

At times in a novel, a carnivalesque situation arises where a weak character rebels and confronts the authority or does something that reverses the power positions temporarily. Denith says that carnivalized writings are those "which has taken the carnival spirit into itself and thus reproduces, within its own structures and by its own practice, the characteristic inversions, parodies and discrownings of carnival proper" (63). Though in *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin's emphasis is more on bodily functions and grotesque, but somewhere, the central tendency behind it is to emphasize anti-authority and liberating spirit.

In *The Kite Runner*, carnivalesque features are expressed by momentarily shifting the power in the hands of the wimpy characters. There are instances of situational and contextual carnivalesque in the novel where a timid character with a feeble voice confronts and challenges the powerful. One such instance of situational carnivalesque arises in the novel *The Kite Runner* when Assef, who enjoys a power position, tries to hit Amir when they were little kids, and Hassan protects Amir by pointing a slingshot toward Assef and asking him to leave Amir and him alone. This momentary overturning of power positions is carnivalesque. Hassan, a servant boy from the minority who often remains silent, takes the center position and threatens Assef in these words; "you didn't notice that I am the one holding slingshot"

(Hosseini *Kite Runner* 37). Assef is an upper-class Pashtun (powerful community) boy who often threatens the people of the Hazara (lower class) community, and he always remains assured that he is allowed to do anything nasty to anyone. This confidence comes from him being upper class. Kids are often afraid of him and never retaliate in any form to the insults he often hurls at them. But when Hassan an agency less boy challenges him, it turns out like destabilizing the mighty as it happens during carnival where positions are exchanged to give power to powerless. One more situational carnivalesque comes when, later in the novel, Amir dares to meet Assef, a Taliban official, to get Shorab (Hassan's son) free from Assef's clutches. Amir was beaten badly by Assef and could not fight back, but even after being beaten red and blue, he starts laughing, "I don't know at what point I started laughing but I did. It hurt to laugh...But I was laughing and laughing. And the harder I laughed, the harder he kicked me, punched me, scratched me" (Hosseini *Kite Runner* 252). Here, laughter in a much-unexpected situation becomes carnivalesque. In this situation, there comes a time when Amir is utterly powerless and accepts defeat, yet he manages to laugh loudly for an instant.

The laughter becomes the mighty weapon to defeat Assef, which leads to a momentary subversion of power. Bakhtin writes in the history of laughter in *Rabelais and his World* that there are moments that depict "the victory of laughter over fear" (90). and one of the important traits of laughter is its relation with people's "unofficial truth"(90).

"The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, and limitations and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation. These elements prevailed in the Middle Ages. Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations" (90).

During the same fight, Sohrab, an orphan Hazara boy, screams at Assef to stop hurting Amir by yelling 'Bas'(stop) and pulls the slingshot on Assef's face and injures his left eye. A very weak boy snatches the power position for a moment and defeats the powerful opponent, creating a carnivalesque moment. "The main purpose of carnival is supplanting the hierarchical voice in a context that there is only one dominant source of power" (Hooti et al.).Sohrab has lost his parents at the hands of the Taliban and is also used as a child prostitute by Taliban official Assef. He was so traumatized at such an early age that he remained quiet most of the time. But when he witnesses Amir being beaten by Assef, he, a little boy with no power, rescues him by crushing Assef with one slingshot.

Dentith explains that Bakhtin not only indulges in the scholarly inquiry of a novel but also establishes its aesthetic. This aesthetic becomes prominent and

attractive with anti-authoritarianism and pluralism, where the final word does not come from an authoritative voice (60). When Assef tells Amir he is on a mission of God to make Afghanistan clean of unwanted litter and calls it ethnic cleansing. Amir, though, is very feeble and afraid of Assef but voices out the truth and takes the center position momentarily, he tells Assef “what mission is that?, Stoning adulterers? Rapping Children? Flogging women for wearing high heels? Massacring Hazaras? All in the name of Islam?” (Hosseini *Kite Runner* 248). Above situations depict how power positions are swept swiftly.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila, the second wife of Rasheed, hits back at her husband while he is beating her. This is an example of challenging the powerful and also twisting the power dynamics momentarily. “It was the first time she'd struck anybody...She hit him hard. The impact actually made him stagger two steps backward (...) She might have grinned when, to her astonishment, Rasheed calmly walked out of the room” (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 292). Mariam, who has suffered the atrocities of her husband Rasheed silently, finally musters the courage and, hits him with all her strength and kills him. This killing indicates an inversion of hierarchy. The weakest character in the novel becomes powerful, though momentarily, and does the most unexpected act.

In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Odie (Markos mother) once raised the gun against the cruel father of her friend Madaline in order to save her from continuous beatings and physical torture inflicted by her father. As Madaline described, her father was the meanest kind of human being, who liked to show his power by beating his daughter. He was very sure that no one could help her, and he used to threaten her with these words; “all right ,girly, all right, and you knew it was coming-the storm, it was coming –and it could not be stopped. No one can help you” (Hosseini *Mountain Echoed* 294). Her father was so intoxicated with his power that he thought that nobody could challenge him and save his daughter. But to his little knowledge, a young girl who is a friend of her daughter can challenge him by holding a gun and aiming at him. So, the position of someone who is fully soaked in power is challenged by a girl. “She went to Madeline's father and raised the barrel and shoves against his chin and says, Do it again and I will come back and shoot you in the face with this rifle” (Hosseini *Mountain Echoed* 296). The so-called powerful male is so terrified of this threat from a girl that he peed in his pants. This situation of snatching power by a weak person is wrapped in a carnivalesque sense and indicates that the power position can be switched at any moment.

By applying the Bakhtinian theory of carnivalesque, the contextual fall of those who hold the power positions can be traced as some of the marginalized

snatch the power positions. A sense of carnivalism seeps in strongly when an agency-less character raises the voice against the monologic established notions, and there is a momentary fall of the powerful characters from hierarchical positions. According to Bakhtin, there is unfinalizability, where no character can remain in the center position all the time. Hosseini tries to demean the power positions of strong characters and denies them to remain unchallenged on power positions continuously by incorporating carnivalesque scenarios in his works.

Temporary Suspension of The Norms

Carnavalesque is also breaking and suspending societal norms and expectations momentarily. “Bakhtin’s understanding of the ‘carnavalesque’ involves a temporary suspension of the normal order, breaking down barriers, norms, prohibitions and etiquettes as well as reversing the existing hierarchical distinctions” (MacMillanp 3). Deviating from established regulations and social standards temporarily also aligns very well with the spirit of carnivalesque. The momentary occurrence of this behavior challenges the official setups. The reason for this kind of behavior heavily depends upon the context and circumstances. “World in which the flouting of, and challenging authority along with disrespect for, and disregard of, what is deemed sacred and valued are vital and instrumental, where individuals are liberated from any restrictions imposed on them outside carnival and are permitted to pursue what pleases them” (Abootalebi & Kargara) The characters in the novels under discussion, like to show their anguish against the system by treading on the path of rebellion by breaking the rigid repressive norms. Challenging societal expectations sometimes helps in developing new perspectives and outlooks. “Institution forms of oppression have periodically been defeated, transformed, or at least temporarily checked by carnivalesque forms of public protest” (Bruner 136). Those who are in power positions and exercise suppression by inducing fear are often confronted by the carnivalesque behavior of the suppressed.

In *The Thousand Splendid Suns* the abuse of power done by Rasheed to torture and beat the women of the house. These women, Laila and Mariam, dared to flee from the house to attain the unknown freedom. This behavior of women is considered outrageous by the Taliban-led government and is quite unexpected in Afghan society. To muster this momentary courage of escaping and discarding the expected gender behavior is carnivalesque.

Laila and Tarique's love indulgence and secret meetings also count as defying the behavioral expectations of society. As soon as they have crossed the threshold of childhood friendship, they develop feelings of love for each other. They started

kissing in the empty streets of their neighborhood, which is quite an alien thing in rigid Afghan society. They got intimate when the situation was quite tense outside due to Taliban-led turmoil in Kabul. This incident led to the early pregnancy of Laila at the age of fifteen years. The narrator describes the scene as very intense: "the terror that they would be discovered. The disbelief at their own boldness, their courage. The strange and indescribable pleasure, interlaced with pain" (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 178). This momentary act of intimacy can be viewed as bending the rules for personal fulfillment. The characters are conscious that they are breaking the rules by acting in undesired ways, but they still do so for fun, though temporarily. In carnival festivities, people also defy the official anything for momentary pleasure. A similar case that occurs in the novel is when people of Afghanistan watch the Hollywood movie *Titanic* stealthily under strict Taliban rule of banning all sorts of entertainment and indulging in any sort of banned merry-making invites dire consequences.

Hosseini gives his characters a chance to choose iconoclastic ways and deviate from accepted standards and cherished beliefs. Mrs. Neela Wahdati breaks the gender role expectations of Afghan society and adopts wayward behavior to baffle everyone around her. The deviant behavior is to register her annoyance against the societal systems. Neela's adopted daughter Pari falls in love with her mother's lover and starts living with him for quite a period of time. This is also an unexpected behavior, even in a very frank and open French society. Both mother and daughter try to break away from the desired conventions to present their anguish in the most rebellious ways possible. Mr. Wahdati falls in love with a man who is his driver and cook. Same-sex love is the most scandalous in the rigid society of Afghanistan. These characters broke away from conventions in order to achieve personal fulfillment. The true spirit of carnivalesque is also to behave in unconventional ways for the sake of enjoyment and fulfillment.

In the novel *The Kite Runner*, the friendship between Hassan and Amir poses a challenge to the hierarchies of society by blurring the societal boundaries between the lower and upper classes. The carnival theme of inclusivity becomes true here as a servant Hazara boy is treated equally in a higher order of the Pashtun family of Amir. Despite being from different backgrounds, they share a strong friendship bond. This friendship between these two boys of unequal stature challenges the prevailing societal norms and expectations. According to Keith, Carnavalesque is a technique of subversion that challenges oppressive political structures and undermines authoritarian ideologies by breaking the rules. Carnavalesque elements in these novels light up the ways by which characters smash societal expectations

and fracture tyrannical rules. Through moments of uprising and departure from set standards, characters such as Laila, Mariam, Neela Wahdati, Mr. Wahdati, Pari, Amir, and Hassan claim a temporary hold on the position of agency in the face of the repressive system. Temporary suspension of norms is reflected whether it is Laila and Mariam's heroic attempt to escape from patriarchal tyranny, Hassan and Amir's norm-breaking friendship, and the capricious ways of Wadhaties to dissent against societal expectations. These instances of carnivalesque behavior represent the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Grotesque Bodies and Exaggerated Physicality

The theme of grotesque bodies and exaggerated physicality intertwined with the theory of carnivalesque in the novels. Depictions of deformed bodily features and extreme levels of abuse on the body are also carnivalesque since they depart from the ideal bodily representations. Grotesque bodies and exaggerated physicality are used as persuasive tools for disregarding the established conventions and exposing the superficiality of human set standards of the body. The representation of grotesque bodies prepares grounds for characters that become marginal due to deformity in their physical features or the ones who do not fit into the set beauty standards of society. By giving place to such characters to share their experience, the author subverts the hierarchies that are based on physical appearance. In doing so, the author discards the notion of a fixed and immutable social order and provides space for the voices of physically challenged characters. The carnivalesque celebrates the grotesque and exaggerated bodily representation and provides a critique of societal ideals and norms surrounding beauty, health, and bodily perfection. Hosseini, by depicting the bodies that do not fit into conventional standards, exposes the fragility of these norms and also questions the power dynamics that uphold them. By providing a rich picture of extreme bodily tortures, deformities and injuries, Hosseini confirms the materiality and corporeality of human existence.

The extreme representation of the body through various characters in the novels taken in this study demystifies the ideal idea of the body and surfaces some disturbing realities from the arena of taboo and stigma. The spirit of carnivalesque is manifested in the moments when physical deformities and challenges become the site of the revelation of truth. The characters transform their physical limitations as tools of agency and resilience. Representation of grotesque and exaggerated physicality in these novels significantly embraces the carnivalesque spirit and serves as instrumentation for subversion, critique, and celebration. Bakhtin confirmed that "contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest

of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits (*Rabelais World* 26).

In the novel *The Kite Runner*, the body is objectified on various occasions. The rape of Hassan by Assef highlights the brutality and dehumanization inflicted upon the body for taking revenge or covering the defeat at the Kite Tournament. Stone pelting at the football ground upon a couple who are declared adulterers by the Taliban is an extreme example of bodily torture for merrymaking and showing power. The cleft lip of Hassan, which is corrected later by surgery, shows the physical and mental trauma of not befitting the set standards. Disgracing the body is the source of merrymaking for one and showing resilience for others. Amir was beaten so badly by Assef, but he found a different kind of solace even in that beating because that becomes his way to clearing the debt he owes to Hassan. The suffering inflicted upon the body became the route of mental peace. Amir says, "my body was broken-just how badly I wouldn't find out until later- but I felt *healed*. Healed at last"(Hosseini *Kite Runner* 253). Later while he was recovering at a hospital in Pakistan, there is a graphic representation of his broken body, and the doctor told him jokingly, "your job today is to pass gas. You do that, and we can start feeding you liquids. No fart, no food" (Hosseini *Kite Runner* 259).

In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, extreme torture by Rasheed upon Laila and Mariam gives the reader an opportunity to see the evils of patriarchy. Laila once said that "she never would have believed that a human body could withstand this much beating, this viciously, this regularly, and keep functioning" (Hosseini *Thousand Suns*315). The continuous physical torture and abuses hurled at these women gave them the courage to flee from the situation and later retaliate in the same manner. This physical extremism foregrounds resilience in these characters. At the hospital, Rabia Balkhi, there is a very disturbing representation of human bodies. Human bodies are disgraced to the extreme, women are suffering labor pains, and there is blood all around but no facilities to attain these women in dire need of medical attention. When Mariam was searching for help for Laila, who was about to give birth, she heard groans all over the place; a woman was crying, "my daughter's water broke and the baby won't come,(...) A woman from behind yelled that her girl had broken her elbow(...) Another woman cried that she was passing bloody stools" (Hosseini *Thousand Suns* 280). The worst of all, there was no anesthetic in the hospital for Caesarean section. Laila, under excruciating labor pains, told the doctor that she was ready for a C-section without anesthetic, "cut me open and give me my baby" (*Thousand Suns* 283). These are examples of grotesque bodily representation, of which the main principle is degradation; as Bakhtin also

explained, “To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth” (*Rabelais World* 21).

Graphic representation of the paralytic body of Mr. Wahdati and the deformed body of Masooma in the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* provides grounds for a broader exploration of the human conditions and societal norms within the novel. The author provides them space among the all-abled bodies to offer profound insights into this bodily marginalization. The hint of carnivalesque in this representation questions the idealized representation of the human body and ignites the readers to reassess their preconceived notions of attractiveness and moral values. A character named Thalia, a Greek citizen who, represents a perspective outside the settings of Afghan culture. Her character offers insights into the challenges a person with bodily deformities faces in Western societies. Her face was gnawed by a dog, and that has made her look very hideous. But when Markos’ mother protects her in school and asks everyone to accept her the way she is, everything becomes normal. Markos’s mother tells Thalia not to wear a mask to hide her face, and she says very firmly, “I am not ashamed of You” (Hosseini, *Mountain Echoed* 323). Thalia’s character in the novel surfaces the universality of experience related to physical disabilities and deformities.

Hosseini, by putting the deformed bodies against the abled bodies, presents the contrast and tension that make the story richer. The vulnerability and resilience represented by deformed bodies sometimes take the central position in the narrative, sidelining the conventional bodily perspectives. The representation of exaggerated and deformed bodies in the narrative supports the carnivalesque spirit. Hosseini invites readers to confront their own biases and reevaluate societal standards by highlighting the experiences of characters with grotesque bodies, deformities, and extreme bodily torture. In doing so, he aligns his narrative with the carnivalesque tradition of celebrating the marginalized and disrupts the existing standards, ultimately asserting the resilience and diversity of the human experience.

Conclusion

Carnavalesque is like a momentary tornado that uproots the established orders. The analysis through the Bakhtinian concept of carnivalesque generates a different understanding of the novels *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And The Mountains Echoed* that goes far from the authorial intention of fixed meanings. The multiplicity of the voices in the novel provokes a continuous struggle to hold the power positions. Hosseini subtly designs the situations and context where the

spirit of carnival is incorporated and power- positions are toppled. Bakhtin's idea of carnivalesque guides us to look for instances, both contextual and situational, where the momentary exchange of power positions takes place. As written in the foreword of the book *Rebelais and His World* by Krystyna Pomorska) "the carnival principle corresponds to and is indeed a part of the novelistic principle itself(...) so carnivalization is the condition for the ultimate "structure of life" that is formed by "behavior and cognition" (X). The novel incorporates the element of *reversal* naturally. The characters fall into situations where they struggle to temporarily gain control over things. In pursuit of libration, the characters break the set norms of society and indulge in carnival-type celebratory mode. The novels also give central positions to grotesque bodies and exaggerated physicality to make them more carnivalesque in nature.

In conclusion, the exploration of Khaled Hosseini's novels through the literary analytical tool of carnivalesque surfaced the hidden threads of narratives, plot dimensions, and characters that challenge and subvert the official order of things. Through the representation of alternative perspectives, subversion of hierarchies, breaking of norms, and depictions of grotesque bodies, Hosseini has woven narratives that reverberate deeply with readers, inviting them to question established societal norms and ideals. Applying Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque to Hosseini's famous novels set out a way to analyze the texts in a very profound manner. The three novels that are being analyzed contain narratives so profound that they have the ability to leave a lasting impression on the reader's mind. These impressions are so powerful that they often generate a strong urge in the reader to explore the story from different angles and interpret it using various approaches. Bakhtinian's approach of carnivalesque helped to analyze the novels in a unique manner where subversion, rebellion and deviation from set patterns is explored.

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