
A SUBALTERN HAS SPOKEN?: SELF-(RE)ORIENTALISM IN ATIQ RAHIMI'S THE PATIENCE STONE

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Abstract

*Afghanistan has always been an arena for international conflicts and has served as a buffer zone for the world powers wherein to settle their disputes. The decades long wars and turbulences have left the country devastated and its people vulnerable. And as such it has not yet passed that phase of being a lucrative part of the orient, worthy of the representation and stereotyping of the west, as well as its own people. The present study tries to examine what such self-representations might entail. For this purpose, Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* (2008) has been selected which is the story of one woman's tormented inner self in search of a voice. Re-orientalization theory by Lisa Lau (2003), Dirlik's (1996) theory of Self-Orientalism and Spivak's (1988) conception of Subalternity have been used as theoretical framework. Said's (1978) *Orientalism* has also been consulted as a background theory. The findings of the study underline that the culturally indiscrete portrayal of Afghani identity is actually a colonial portrayal by the author in a postcolonial era. Moreover, the claim for authentic representation ends up in self-stereotyping and misrepresentation of the diverse ethnic groups within the country because the strategies of representation used by the author are not devoid of their inherent politics and are, thus, ethical and political in nature. Furthermore, the sense of self in a postcolonial era and the hegemony of "us" and "them" within the self in the context of Afghanistan have also been highlighted in this analysis.*

Keywords: orientalism, re-orientalism, self-orientalism, representation, stereotyping, subaltern

1. Introduction

As cultural proxies of the Afghan experience, Afghan writers address societal realities and human conditions common to most Afghans in their fictional writings. The core concern of Afghan diasporic writers is to outlaw Talibanization, extremism, terrorism and bring peace to Afghanistan. Therefore, many of these writers supported the West in their writings and ended up misrepresenting or under-representing Afghan people who have been depicted as inferior, illiterate, feminine, exploited, barbarian and so on. This act on part of Afghan writers falls in the domain of self-orientalism that is essentially a reconfiguration and, in many ways, an extension of Orientalism. It proposes that Orientalism is not simply the autonomous creation of the West, but rather the Orient itself participates in its stereotyping and, thus, participates in the construction, reinforcement and circulation of orientalist discourse.

Said (1978) argues that the production and acquisition of knowledge of the Orient, or the ‘other’, by the west is neither objective nor unbiased. Rather, it is the end-result of a process that reflects particular interests and a Eurocentric worldview [18]. Specifically, Said stresses the point that “the West-Europe and the United States look at the countries of the Orient through a lens that distorts the reality of those places and the people who live there. He calls that lens through which the West perceives and conceives that part of the world ‘Orientalism’” [19]. Orientalism has operated in various historical paradigms but has always emphasized specific Western constructions of the Orient. Nowadays, the concept has metamorphosed to refer to new constructions of the Orient. New representations of Islam and the Muslim world are dominating the Western public space. This Islamophobia is evident in the construction of the image of the terrorist as an ‘exotic other’. However, the fact that there exist various Islamic trends and traditions, different religious and secular views and movements, different social and cultural varieties of the Muslim world—the diversity of political and social actors within Muslim countries are all put aside. Thus, they leave a vacuum which is filled with an essentialist and culturalist reading grid of a monolithic and unchanging Muslim world.

The classical works of the orientalists endorse Edward Said’s Orientalism and have contributed in the Orientalization process, showing Afghans as Others. However, sometimes indigenous writers themselves are the part of this process who are giving their representations from the Occidental perspective, wearing the glasses of western style and conception. The self-representations from western perspective, deconstructing Said’s Orientalism, is called Self-Orientalism which is the aim of the researcher to

explore in the selected novel. In this research, I take Afghanistan as one form of the cultural representation consumed in the West and focus on the image of Afghanistan that produce and re-produce itself as the desirable ‘other’ to the Occident. Moreover, the research explores the inter-braiding of Self-Orientalism in Afghan fiction. This research also explores that how postcolonial writers take part in the re-orientalization process.

Self-Orientalism is an outcome of the East’s representation and expression of itself from the eyes of the West with the image that West has fictionalized for it. Feighery (2009) has explained it as that image creators of the Middle East as writing from “an Occidental Script” [6]. So, beside the West, this binary relationship has also been strengthened by the Oriental elite class or those who have been facilitated by West, like the native informants and comprador intellectuals, appropriated to the Western cannon. Further, they used the identical approach in their writings for the depiction of the Orient, directly linked with original Saidian perspectives of Orientalism and this mode of representation is called re-orientalization. So, re-orientalization by the Orient itself or the Orientals helping the West in doing so, is called self-orientalism.

Afghanistan, as orient, has been Orientalized and Re-Orientalized for the last few decades and it became the center of world attention once more after the 9/11. Afghan people have been identified with stereotypical images in Orientalists’ works where they have been shown as illiterate, barbarian, irrational, revengeful, cut-throats, kidnapers etc., but the role of Afghan fiction writers in reinforcing and circulation these images is no less substantial.

Selection of the Text: *The Patience Stone* (2010)

Atiq Rahimi was born in Afghanistan in 1962. He migrated to France in 1984 and sought political asylum there because of the ongoing war in his home country. In France he became famous by making documentary and feature films, and also as a fiction writer. His first book *Earth and Ashes* published in 2001 has won him international acclaim. He has adopted this book for a feature film in 2004. Rahimi lives in Paris but since 2001 (after the US invasion), he has returned to Afghanistan several times to establish a Writers’ House in Kabul and to support and train young Afghan creative writers and filmmakers.

In this work Atiq Rahimi has given voice to marginalized and oppressed women who have been exploited and suffered a lot in different scenario in Afghanistan. The book deals with the themes of war, marriage, sex, love and honour. *The Patience Stone*

is a distressing search of a woman's tortured internal life. The novel has won many prizes like the Prix Goncourt. The success of the novel can be judged from the fact that it has been translated into several languages and has also been adopted for a feature film in 2012. An Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra who has written *The Swallows of Kabul*, says about this novel, "With a veiled face and stolen words, a woman keeps silent about her forbidden pain in an Afghanistan marred by men's foolishness. But when she rediscovers her voice, she overcomes the chaos" (Rahimi, 2010:2).

The origin of this mythical story referred to in the title is from Persian folktales according to which *Sang-e-Saboor* is that black stone with magical effects, a patience stone, which captivates the predicament of the people who confess their plights in it. It is said and believed that on a certain day the black stone bursts into pieces, because it would have received too much hardships, pains and miseries from the people confessing in it. It will be a day the people are relieved of their burdens and the day of the Armageddon—the apocalypse. The story goes further and says that it will protect the person who puts it in front of him and confesses in it. Or if anyone confesses to it the burdens of his/her life, it will absorb all the plight and will unburden that person from anguish of miseries but here, *Sang-e-Saboor* is not an actual or mythological stone, rather sang-e-sabour is a man. The husband of the protagonist of the novel lying motionless and brain-dead with a bullet stuck in his neck. He was a freedom fighter who fought on several front. The irony of the situation is that he has not received that bullet in the war rather in a fight with a person in the street when that person called bad names to his mother. Somewhere in Afghanistan or elsewhere, the wife of this ex-soldier or militant or terrorist or Talib who is lying helpless and unconscious with a bullet stuck in the back of his neck, the unnamed protagonist of *the novel* (the woman) takes care for her husband, changes the drip of sugar and salt solution from time to time and also moisten his eyes by putting drops, during these chores she unburdens herself of the truth about her feelings toward him and the secrets of her life she had kept hidden for so long. Thus, this soldier becomes the "*Sang-e Saboor*" for the protagonist and so the title *The Patience Stone*. [17]

2. Theoretical Framework

The paper subscribes to Lisa Lau's (2009) Re-Orientalism and Dirlik's (1996) theory of Self-Orientalism as theoretical framework, along with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which serves as a background theory because it opens up the

way for discussion about re-orientalism and self-orientalism. I also draw on the arguments of Spivak's (1988).

Lisa Lau's "*Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals*" (2009) foregrounds re-Orientalism as the production of "the Orient" by Orientals themselves, instead of western orientalists. As a result, the Orient is constructed by those who write as 'authentic' Asians or as 'transparent communicators' of the plights of the oppressed. In the case of Atiq Rahimi, he is an expatriate Afghan diasporic writer which makes him an 'authentic voice' on Afghan culture. Further, Lisa Lau explains that re-Orientalism is "based on how cultural producers with Eastern affiliations come to terms with an Orientalized East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of western readers, by playing (along) with them or by discarding them altogether" [10]. Atiq Rahimi has been residing in the West where he has been exposed to the stereotypical images of Afghan culture and people and, actually, he is writing for an international audience who have their own expectations formed by exposure to the popular images both in fiction and on mass media. They are desirous to know why they are at war in Afghanistan. Rahimi is providing them the answer. Furthermore, Dirlik's (1996) theory of Self-Orientalism proposes that the Orient itself participates in the construction, reinforcement and circulation of orientalist discourse [3]. It is perceived that Self-Orientalism occurs when the Oriental would use the Western style of thought and stereotype in terms of self-definition. This is point is pertinent to my discussion because instead of shedding or challenging the stereotypical images of Afghanistan, *The patience Stone* reinforces and circulates the popularized images in the western style and mode of thinking.

The literature of Self-Orientalism includes two approaches that situate Self-Orientalism. The first is the theory of Dirlik (1996). Dirlik proposes that East has been heavily influenced by Western conceptions, where orientalist knowledge has been so internalized and self-inscribed by the East, that it is next to native from Western propositions [3]. Ideas in the East then become inseparable from Western ideas [22]. Further, he proposes that it is a profound consequence of the Orient striving for modernity as those representations, as they speak of desires and yearnings of seeking equality with the West, posit reflexively at its own cultural premise, hence invoking Self-Orientalism [3]. In this case, the act of Self-Orientalism would be intentional. The motivation would be to pursue modernity and the acceptance of the West in order to achieve it. And this seems to be the case with

Atiq Rahimi who in order to be recognized by the west ('affiliation in the guise of filiation') ends up in the process of self-orientalism.

For the analysis of the character of the protagonist (the woman) in the novel, who is a doubly marginalized Afghan woman, I will be using Spivak's notion of subalternity in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Atiq Rahimi has depicted one female in order to give her voice and face and presents her as a proxy woman for the grievances of all Afghan women like her which is a problematic stance on the basis of subaltern agency [20].

3. Research Questions

1. What are the strategies of representation employed in the novel and how its politics involved in them?
2. To what extent Atiq Rahimi has contributed in the self-(re)orientalization of Afghanistan in *The Patience Stone*?

4. Thesis Statement

In *The Patience Stone* Atiq Rahimi is concerned with giving voice and face to Afghan people and culture, especially its women but he seems to re-orientalize the Orient in his novel within the context of self-Orientalism by using western style and mode of thinking. This paper maintains that the Self-Orientalist perspective is likely to be useful for reading the text to investigate the elements of self-Orientalism, initiated by the Orientals themselves.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Orientalism refers to the representation of aspects of Eastern cultures in the West, and was devised in order to have authority over the Orient but now the process has reversed and 'Orientals' are seen to perpetuate Orientalism no less than 'non-Orientals'. The perpetuation is essentially a reconfiguration and, in many ways, an extension of Orientalism. Re-orientalization of the Orient itself is called self-orientalism and the employed concept has been in circulation in academia for at least the last three decades, termed as 'ethno-orientalism' (Carrier 1992), 'self-orientalism' (Dirlik 1996), 'internal orientalism' (Schein 1997), 'reverse Orientalism' (Tony Mitchell 2004) and re-orientalism (Lau, 2009).

Self-Orientalism is a tool in postcolonial discourse to re-orientalize the Orient in the writings of Orientals identified by Yan and Santos (2009) and Feighery (2012) identified Self-Orientalism in Dirlik's *Chinese History and the Question of*

Orientalism (1996). The article of Yan and Santos (*China Forever: Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism*) deals with the literature on tourism representation, shows how Orient represents itself in the contemporary tourism discourse. The undertaken issue in the article suggests that China has confirmed its representation to Orientalists discourses. Yan and Santos mention: “it reveals a changeless, nostalgic, mythical and feminized China that speaks to a Western Orientalistic imagination; and creates a modern China subjugated to Western understanding and authority over modernity. It argues that contemporary non-Western tourism discourse recognizes the marketability of Otherness and caters affably to Western tourists through reinventing, reconstructing and renegotiating marketable Chinese identities-self Orientalism” [23]. Further, they describe Self-Orientalism as either a way of striving for modernity and equality with the West or as a practice by the Oriental because his or her own knowledge is already so heavily influenced by Western conceptions [23].

Tourism and self-Orientalism in Oman: A Critical Discourse Analysis by William. G Feighery (2012) perceives that literature and art of Orientals are anticipating giving the Self-image of Orient from Occidental perspective, acknowledging the dominancy of the West. Further, the article suggests that scholars from the Middle East still acknowledge that indigenous image creators of the Middle East continue to read from Orientalists script, envisage binaries i.e., us and them, West and East, Orient and Occident and so on. Furthermore, the article mentions neo-Orientalists strategies which are imposed on Orient for Orientalizing. The paper gives reference from Omani movie *Welcome to My Country* which initiates the stance of Orientals’ representation from Occidental script [6].

Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes’ *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The oriental Other within* (2011) is about the Orientalization of the Orient from Occidental perspective, followed by Orientals themselves. The contributors of the book thus aim to locate instances of re-Orientalism in contemporary novels, television, and films that are produced in South Asia and South Asian diasporic cultural formations. They merge the theory of re-orientalism as they analyzed different Orientals’ works from novels, films, television etc, and named it Self-Orientalism [11].

In her essay “Under the Western Eyes”, Mohanty has outlined a set of signifiers associated with a third world woman, as conceived by the west, which have been conceived and used by many Eastern writers for example in Khalid

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, this imagined woman is represented as "sexually constrained... ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.," as opposed to the western women who are represented as educated, modern, having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" [13]. She further says that the existing First/Third World connections are maintained by images of the veiled woman, obedient wife or powerful mother etc. [14]. And these binaries have been endorsed, reinforced and circulated by Hosseini in his novel.

The logical question which arises is that why are the representations of an imagined third world woman accepted as the ultimate, static and bland truth, even by the oriental writers? It is because they are being looked at and read as part of the landscape and because those representations are reflected consistently in fiction and mass media and have been internalized. Afghanistan must be represented this way for the international community so that they might be able to justify why they are at war in Afghanistan. In light of this, we must not look at Hosseini's text for accurate /inaccurate representation, but view *The Kite Runner* as a historically situated cultural phenomenon that is packaged, marketed and sold to the international community which is desirous to know what is happening out there [16]. West now needs native agents, the so called 'authentic voices', to endorse their agendas.

From the above discussion it is evident that fiction and mass media are the two important tools of representation, whether positive or negative. But why fiction and mass media? It is because of their aspect of global outreach. Moreover, Creative Writing is one of the ways through which ideas about development can be represented and be taken seriously (by masses) for, according to Cowen and Shenton (1995), development is one of the organizing concepts of this age and ideas of development can be represented in various ways. As compared to academic writings and policy research documents, the work of fiction is better as it can reach a large number of audiences and are influential in shaping their knowledge. When an administration wants to build public support, which is in fact crucial for policies of development, especially in a specific environment (a war stricken country for example), it seeks the help of fiction [2]. The example of the extraordinary popularity of Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) is a direct result of the ongoing US-war on terror in Afghanistan. The novel has reached over 20 million people around the globe, educating them about Afghanistan and its problems, during and after the Taliban rule, than any other media campaign, report or research has ever

done. But fiction cannot be reliable all the time and writers may sometimes misrepresent or indulge in stereotypes and self-Orientalize themselves.

Indigenous writers like Khalid Hosseini who claim to have a deeper understanding of his own culture and people even then has under-represented Afghanistan. But their works are being popularized, packaged and marketed for the international community. These writers often rely on the internalized media images, because they have been residing in the west. In *The Kite Runner* (2003), Hosseini's representations of the inhabitants, the land and the history of Afghanistan are conformed to popularized imaginings of Afghanistan as the orient. Amir's adventurous return home in 2001 was solely for the purpose to depict Afghan women, who were described as either "burqa-clad... [living] alongside gutters" [8], victims of the Taliban's punishments, or silenced in their *hijab*. This puts a question mark on Hosseini's credibility as an authentic representor of Afghanistan and its people.

Same is the case with mass media. A research paper titled *Depiction of Identity in Burka Avenger: A Re-orientalist Exploration* by Zara Rizwan (2019) throws light on the negative role of the mass media in depicting the distorted image of a nation and its culture. The aim of mass media to provide entertainment is embedded in showcasing the culture and values of a nation. By doing so, it promotes national identity and presents a soft image of the nation to the mass audience. Contrary to this, the paper presents its argument against the irresponsible role of the mass media in depicting the negative identity of Pakistani culture through its analysis of an animated series with the title "Burka Avengers" by Haroon Sheikh. Such colonized depiction in postcolonial era weakens the sense of national identity and cultural values. The negative role of the mass media in twisting the true facts about the diverse Pakistani culture and ethnic boundaries has been criticized in the paper, which, according the author, is self-stereotyping and ends up in Re-Orientalizing of the orient [24].

6. Analysis

6.1 Internalization of Western and Orientalist Values

The classical orientalism of Edward Said fails to cover the re-orientation of the orient. His thesis is concerned with the representation of the Orient by the Orientalists. In his argument, first of all, Said considers the Orient as an idea, which has been constructed, since antiquity through a discourse, the so called 'systematic

knowledge'. However, the Orient is not such an idea which is without its corresponding reality, in fact it is present out there but this binarism of the *Orient* and the *Occident* is intrinsically political in nature and thus involves the privileging of one concept over the other and it is what Said questions. What the Westerners call a systematic knowledge about the Orient is basically their biases and prejudices, which give an image of the Orient the way they wanted it to be, not the way it existed or still exists, for that matter. Said maintains that every nation and civilization has its views, often simplistic images, about other cultures and civilizations and there is no harm in holding such views because it is natural. But when such views are being adopted by, a militarily and economically, superior nation, then power politics comes into play. It was this supposed superior position of the Occident over the Orient that legitimized the whole colonial and 'civilizing mission' (Said, 1978).

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said is mainly concerned with representation. He has quoted Karl Marx at the beginning of his book, "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (Said, 1978), suggesting that how this phenomenon was taken for granted even by the intellectuals of the time. But such representations are full of stereotypes and (over)generalizations. He has given many examples in this regard like Balfour, Cromer, Flaubert and Marx etc. These representations resulted in the construction of the Oriental Discourse. The question arises that why are they doing it? The answer is that because the Orient is exotic, mysterious and even romantic: worthy of their representations. Thus a body of knowledge—a prison box of discourse—is constructed, after which no orientalist can think outside it.

Now, here is a strange case of representation and stereotyping of the Orientals by the Orientals themselves. In this case, people belonging to the orient are representing and stereotyping the Orientals, using the western standards and modes of inquiry; internalization of the western values and based on self-othering. Lisa Lau (2009) has developed this thesis to have an insight into the matter of representation by the Orientals and Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* falls under this heading. The subsequent pages of this chapter are an analysis of his novel from the New-Orientalist and Re-orientalist perspectives, where my focus is to bring features of self and re-orientalism to light.

Afghanistan has been represented for decades because of its centrality to world's power politics. Now, due to the change in world order after the 9/11, the

direct influence of America can be seen in the world, especially in the orient, that has given a special status to Afghanistan. In the present scenario, alongside the orientalist representations of Afghanistan, representational works by the locals could move forward the agenda of America very well. And now that the orient is well equipped to represent itself to the rest of the world, we saw a series of representational works from Afghan Anglophone fiction writers achieving success and celebrating high critical and favorable acclaim in the globe. The packed and marketed value of such works could be guessed from the reception of Khalid Hussainei's *The Kite Runner*. It has been the world best-selling book reaching 25 million people across the globe.

This has become a classical example of self-orientalism in which the Orient has been re-orientalized by the Orientals themselves or the Orientals helped the West to represent and construct the Orient. The Orientalizing process from Orientals perspective is called self-orientalism. Orient in the contemporary period is capable to give its representation with its ethnicity, language, society, culture, identity and so on, different from the West and it does not require Orientalists representation because it is capable to represent itself. But the problem with such self-orientalization is that the process is informed and governed by the internalization of orientalist modes and values of representation. This, according to Arif Dirlik (1996), is because the East has been heavily influenced by Western conceptions, where orientalist knowledge has been so internalized and self-inscribed by the East that it is next to native from Western propositions.

In the case of Atiq Rahimi, he is an Afghan expatriate writer who has been residing in the West since 1984 where he was exposed to and Influenced by the popular images of Afghanistan circulated in the western media. This conformity is important for the writer in order to survive in their postmodern world. As Yan and Santos (2009) have, for instance, describes Self-Orientalism as either a way of striving for modernity and equality with the West or as a practice by the Oriental because his or her own knowledge is already so heavily influenced by Western conceptions (Yan & Santos, 2009, p.298). The west as whole is postmodern in conception and it cannot tolerate nationalizing tendencies that's why it prefers internationalism, a term which has been signified with self-Orientalism by Brian J. McVeigh (2015) in his book *Japanese Higher Education as Myth* because of the underlined assumption.

The Post-Modern world is no more concerned or limited to the issues of nationalism rather has surpassed nationalism. According to Brian McVeigh that “Internationalism is appropriated to draw attention away from nationalizing tendencies and to gain politico-economic advantages in the globalizing market.” Practices associated with internationalism ironically reinforce Self-Orientalism” (p.150). He further claims that those individuals who are being facilitated by the Occident have adopted self-Orientalism as a tool to Orientalize the Orient. In the present case, I think McVeigh is indirectly describing Atiq Rahimi without mentioning his name.

The authenticity of his work is questionable because of the problematic strategies of representation adopted by the writer. The audience are well aware that the setting is Afghanistan. The action unfolds in a small room of a little house in the disturbed part of a war stricken and unnamed city of Afghanistan where the horrors of war can be felt and heard every now and then during the unfolding of events of the story. Then what is the significance of the statement in the initial pages of the novel according to which the story takes place ‘somewhere in Afghanistan or elsewhere’ (Ibid, 1). The significance is clear that the writer has chosen popular imaginings as his strategy for representing Afghan women. He had migrated from his home country when he was still a boy and came back after 17 long years and that too after the US invasion and the exodus of Taliban in 2002. He has missed to observe or experienced the valuable seventeen years of history that is filled with war and violence in his homeland. Now, the situation is pretty grave. Has has to write a novel about Afghanistan and its women, there is little room and choice for him to adopt less problematic strategies of representation but to opt popular imaginings. Although the novel is being inspired from a real life story; that is the barbarous killing of an Afghan poet named Nadia Anjuman at the hands of her husband and his family but the rest is pure imagination. As far as a suitable strategy of representation is concerned, confessional tales seemed the right choice in the given situation but the writer averted it and chose, instead, popular imagining as a strategy of representing Afghan women. The second problematic aspect of Rahimi’s representation is his simplified generalization of Afghan women. According to Mohja Kahf (1999), the entire Muslim world has been misrepresented with reference to women’s victimization, whereas, Western academia, particularly, American book industry welcomes such representation from the West. The hot commodity for American book industry is the writing of Muslim world who are

oppressed. The entire community of Muslim women is homogenous not heterogeneous which is a generalized approach of the West.

One achievement the work is credited for is that Afghan women had been anonymous since long and according to Khalid Hosseini, Atiq Rahimi must be applauded for giving “face and voice to one unforgettable woman—and, one could argue, offers her as a proxy for the grievances of millions”. Rahimi is to be admired further for giving voice to a female character and presenting her as a “conduit, a living vessel for the grievances of millions of women like her, women who have been objectified, marginalized, scorned, beaten, ridiculed, silenced. In *The Patience Stone*, they have their say at last” (Ibid, 1). at the same time, the author is trying to generalize her portrayal as representative of all Afghan women. That is a problematic stance firstly because Afghanistan is a country with diverse ethnic and social structures and secondly because the socio-political situations are not the same everywhere. The experience of the protagonist cannot be generalized. Even feminist critics might object on such notion on grounds of standpoint. Hers is only a perspective and cannot be generalized. It means that this is a problematic stance to present her as a proxy for all Afghan women as she cannot achieve an automatic standpoint because she is a woman. Her struggle is for herself and not for the betterment and uplift of her lot. It is also not the result of a struggle that is political, collective and consciousness. These are the essential attributes for a standpoint to emerge. In this regard, a standpoint must be differentiated from a perspective because: “A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by ‘opening one’s eyes’” (Hardings, 1991).

Rahimi has given voice to a subaltern and it seems that a subaltern has spoken at last. However, his presentation of the protagonist as an archetype for all women of Afghanistan is a faulty position because the experiences of her life cannot be generalized. She cannot be presented as a substitution for the complaints of millions because of the ethnic differences within Afghan identity. This a matter of agency and the strategies employed by the writer for establishing it are not free from their politics. He has chosen a doubly marginalized character indeed but has ignored much strong characters in the process. This omission or selection/rejection on the part of the author is problematic. In the process, only those get selected who conform to the western definition of an oriental woman; weak, submissive, sexually deprived, ignorant and suffering under patriarchy, as opposed to the strong, independent and catalytic woman—the classical binary kept intact.

6.2 Historical Omission: Selection/Rejection of Weak and Powerful Character

The author tried to give his protagonist an automatic agency and standpoint. This act on his part is a problematic position that eventually deprives other powerful characters to have this achievement. He has violated the question of agency for giving voice to one and shutting all other subalterns up (remember that the novel is a monologue and only the protagonist speaks throughout. We are told about other female characters from her mouth and her perspective). Apart from simplified generalizations, there is the problem of historical omissions. In the process of creating an archetypal Afghan woman, the writer has chosen a weak and marginal character without even a name. Throughout the novel she is being referred to as The Woman. By doing so, Rahimi has consciously ignored the many historical strong female voices of resistance from Afghanistan. This historical omission is not a coincidence rather it had been there at the heart of political and ethical representations worldwide. The Orientalists had been practicing this strategy for quite long and now the Orientals are copying their masters in the craft. There are many instances where Rahimi has committed this epistemic violence on the history and people of Afghanistan but I will focus on only two; one historical and one fictional within the novel.

An apt example regarding this view can be cited from the novel in the dedication section in which the author claims that the book has been written in the memory of some NA who turned out to be Nadia Anjuman. She is an Afghan poet who was the victim of domestic violence. She died at the hands of her husband after receiving terrible beating from him. She was studying literature at the University of Herat and was 25 when all this happened. She is the author of *Gule Dudi* (Dark Flower or Flower of Smoke) which is a collection of her poems. Her husband considered her poetry bad for his family reputation and asked her to stop the practice but she kept on writing. Actually, the second collection of her poem was set to be published with the title *Yek sàbad délhoreh* (An Abundance of Worry). This collection was based on poems expressing her loneliness and sorrow regarding her married life, which was the real reason for her death. Majid Ahmad Mai was a graduate in literature himself from the University of Herat and also worked there on an administrative post (New York Times, 2005).

As a first suspect, Mai was arrested and he confessed beating her but told the investigation that she had taken poison after the fight. But this not be confirmed because he and his family influenced and stopped the doctors from the autopsy and fake postmortem report was generated. In light of these evidences, the cause of her death was declared a suicide. The court ruled out the case in favor of Majid who was released from jail within a month (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2008).

Isn't it to present the woman in Atiq Rahimi's novel as a proxy for Nadia? She is no match for her and the struggle she went through. When Nadia Anjuman was in grade 10 her school was shut down by Taliban. She did not give up and studied in The Golden Needle Sewing School which was actually an underground school. All the while writing poetry. This sort of approach to life has given her a standpoint of her own. She does not need the pity mention by a famous writer or being represented by some fictional proxy woman. This is a story worth telling. Rahimi needs to be reminded that look this is a strong female but look what he has done with her—she has been omitted from the text.

Another example of strong and powerful character in the novel is that of the heroin's aunt. She is the only sister of her father in whose lap she had spent her childhood. She was beautiful, loving, caring who used to tell her stories. She was married to a wealthy man. That was the start of her tragic life. As she was infertile was not producing any children, her husband sent her to his farmhouse to her in laws as a servant. There she was raped by her father in law every day and for several years. This story is worse tragedy than the story of the protagonist. One day she decided to flee from there leaving a suicide note in which she had expressed her frustration with life. But she didn't put an end to her life rather she was saved and reached a brothel. Now she has started her own sex business.

The aunt is really an agency for the social role she is playing. She is agentic in this sense that she elevated herself from the social restraints and cultural barriers. She does not care for patriarchy or its rules. Thus she acquires a standpoint, and it should have been her story and her nieces. She escaped a system of patriarchal oppression and is now free, helping and providing shelter to women like her in her brothel. Her movement of resistance is the outcome of a collective political and conscious struggle that will be eventually liberating. And that is a true standpoint. She is subverting the system from within. It was she who help the protagonist secure

her marriage. She managed the whole situation by arranging for her niece to be mated with a young man capable of consummation. That's how she conceived and her marriage was saved.

Further, the oriental view regarding women—sexually mysterious, holding illicit relations, having no moral restrains, emotionally and sexually unsatisfied—has been revisited in this novel. There aren't a lot of women in the novel. The whole story unfolds in a small room and the unnamed protagonist is referred to as 'the woman', the whole action revolves around her character. We come to know about other women through her description and narration, for example her aunt, her mother-in-law, the old lady in her neighborhood and her own mother etc.

She herself is not much of a heroine. In the words of Khalid Hosseini: "Rahimi's heroine is brave, resilient, a devout mother, but she is also flawed in fundamentally human ways, a woman capable of lying, manipulating, of being spiteful, a creature that, pushed hard enough, bares her teeth" (Ibid, 1). Her character needs a deep psycho analysis, for she is not a simple woman rather a complex individual, with serious psychological issues.

It is evident from her monologues that she is suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). As it is the result of some abuse, therefore, it is so possible in her situation to have developed this mental illness, because she had been beaten by her father over slender mistakes when she was a child, and also mistreated by her in laws and her husband. She is playing a role expected of her from the society which has suppressed her true self so far. But now, when her true self is revealing itself, she is afraid of herself. She does not know from where all this is coming. So she concludes: "I really am possessed... Yes, I see the dead... people who aren't there... I am..." (Ibid, 33) She further explains her situation: "This isn't me. No, it isn't me talking... it's someone else, talking through me ... with my tongue. Someone has entered my body ... I am possessed. I really do have a demon inside me. It's she who's speaking... she makes love with that boy..." (Ibid, 30).

It can also be inferred from her monologues that she might be hallucinating, if she sees the dead, which is actually another symptom of Dissociative Identity Disorder. And if it be the case then the whole narrative is questionable; the whole story is, then, the fabrication of her ill condition.

The Mother-in-Law of the protagonist is a typical woman that suppresses her own kind and is a very apt description of the term ‘double colonization’. She migrated from the area with her other sons, leaving behind her injured son and her helpless daughter in law. When her daughter in law was unable to produce a child she insisted her son to take on another wife. That was when the woman’s aunt met her in the marketplace. She came to her rescue and advised her to visit a hakim famous for such miracles. But actually that hakim was the pimp of her aunt, who arranged for her to be mated with a young man blind folded. That’s how she conceived and her marriage was saved.

The woman despised her mother in law. It was she who had denied her little pleasures because her husband was away and she was keeping an eye on her until his return. But it all seemed so normal to the woman who was married to an absent man, a war hero.

The Woman’s mother has not been given much space. We know her, from the description of her own daughter, as being a passive housewife, often beaten by her husband for nothing. Her only crime was that she had produced only daughters for him. He himself was a quill fighter, who loved his quills more than his own family. The mother has accepted her fate and has nothing to say or protest, even when her twelve years old daughter was given as a payment to a forty years old man, to honor the bit her husband has lost in quill fighting.

There is this Old Woman next door. Only the sound of her cough audible. Her routine includes opening the door for the water bearer daily, along with coughing and murmuring inaudible names. On a terrible night when the area was hit by tank mortars, her entire family was the victim of the attack. She has gone mad after the accident and now she roams the city and sing songs of madness. Her character is a reminder of the old lady in *The Kite Runner*, whose voice is barely audible as she speaks. Why we see such characters in fiction consistently. It’s a bitter reality that weak peripheral female voices are constantly being fictionalized while strong voices of liberation and resistance are silenced. The purpose of such fictional construction is to misguide or educate millions of people as it can reach wider audience. Thus, it seems as an organized attempt on the part of the writer to create a universal space for public alliance. A late justification for US and NATO forces to invade Afghanistan and rescue weak brown women from the bounds and chains that have long imprisoned them.

The portrayal of Afghan women depicted by Atiq Rahimi in *The Patience Stone* corresponds exactly to the orientalist images of Afghan Women, where they are depicted as passive victims of war, violence and patriarchy; only and only to be liberated by the American military intervention. They must represent their own culture this way for their own sake. The epistemological term for this practice is ‘Sympathetic identification’ given by Dirlik (1996) and the purpose is to grasp the culture where Orientals are living, meaning the host or alien culture. Therefore, it is inevitable for Orientalists to Orientalize the Orient in identification of alien culture. They are the Orientalists who speak for Orientals

Because of the epistemic privilege the author has gained by being an expatriate and being an Afghan Anglophone fiction writer, non-native readers will consider this depiction as an authentic record on the history and culture of Afghanistan because for them the author has a privileged location and he can speak on their behalf. For readers who have no firsthand contact with Afghanistan, and their only source of information is the orientalist images, will see this fiction influencing their perception on and about Afghanistan. Because we cannot ignore its influence on people’s worldview. Moreover, the educational aspect of fiction can be judged from its wider readership. The example of Khalid Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* is relevant in this regard; more than 12 million copies of which have been sold, received awards and well appreciated reviews. The western, especially, the American readers wanted to know the reason why they are at war in Afghanistan. They were in search of answers and they had certain expectations from authors from the orient. As in the words of Lisa Lau re-Orientalism is “based on how cultural producers with eastern affiliations come to terms with an Orientalized East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of western readers, by playing (along) with them or by discarding them altogether” (2011: 3). Oriental writers like Khalid Husseni and Atiq Rahim have contributed to the orientalist discourse—a discourse that has been developed since antiquity, the so called “systematic knowledge”, full of stereotypes and representations—through the process of re-Orientalism.

6.3. Epistemic Privilege and Epistemic Violence

The location of the author is a significant factor in the production of knowledge. Critical theories are well aware of the socio-historical location of the author and its part in shaping the experiences of the agents and the problems in knowledge produced. So, location is potentially an esteemed contribution to the

production of knowledge. The gender, race, class, sexuality and abilities of an epistemic agent are important aspects in laying the limits of what we are restricted or able to know.

Rahimi's work, firstly, is significant because of his privileged location and secondly, on account of its reception worldwide, and being translated into different languages, and receiving high critical and favorable reviews. As such, the novel continues to influence notions and shape the views of the Western readers about Afghan women, and eventually determine their decisions about the world of Afghan women. Indeed, for them the narratives about Afghan women and what they understand throughout their study of these narratives is more powerful and real than statistics and facts (Witten, 1993).

The scope of these narratives is not only limited to those readers for whom Afghanistan is far away from their perceptual grasp, but it also influences those who have been exposed to the glimpses of Afghanistan (Wheeler, Green, and Brock, 1999). These narratives are capable of changing the reality and to single out the realities that most befit the narrators' ideology and agenda. But the question is that whether Rahimi has been successful in depicting the true picture of Afghan women, after having gotten double vision, for being an outsider within or has he confirmed the stereotypical images shown repeatedly in the Western media. And if the second be the case then his work may not have helped Afghan women in any way, accept foregrounding the way for the US intervention.

Rahimi functions as an informant, an insider who has betrayed his own kind for the sake of worldly gain and his privileged location is, thus, questionable. This is the curious case in which the "positionality of the powerful is simultaneously that of the insider and outsider, where the representing power can be simultaneously self and other." (Lau 2009: 572). Moreover, Rahimi is self-Orientalizing the Orient in alignment with the notion of native informant given by Spivak (1988) and Hamid Dabashi (2006) which presents the perspectives and features of Self-Orientalism. For Spivak who is Native informant? She calls them fictional characters, created with careful and diligent strategy, they are three types of native informants; Native informant, Postcolonial Migrant and the most important for Spivak is Subaltern Woman (*Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 1993). The native informants are those who provide information to the Westerns through different sources while the Postcolonial Migrant was the invention of America, created to intervene with, for

the support of American cultural politics and largely US cannon of wars, continued in different countries (*Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 1993). Here Rahimi is postcolonial migrant and the woman's character is the native informant which has been so diligently constructed using the strategies of confessions and popular imaginings. Similarly, the role of native informants has changed since 9/11 and to highlight the roles of native penned texts, Leila Ahmad very particularly notes that fiction and non-fiction by native, written after 9/11 perpetuate the similar and identical stereotypes about Muslim world (*A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, From the Middle East to America*, 2011, 225).

The Patience Stone, instead of challenging the portrayals of Afghan women in the Western media, reinforces the stereotypical images. These images would be accepted as more authentic and truer, for they are coming from an Afghan writer who is well aware of the country's history and culture. But the reality is on the contrary. Rahimi has compromised his privileged location as an Afghan expatriate Anglophone writer and has used his epistemic position for committing epistemic violence in the discourses on/of Afghanistan.

He has not shed the stereotypical images of Afghan women associated with them in the western media; burqa-clad, uneducated, domestically bound, living under harsh patriarchy and a victim of war and violence. All these are true in the case of Rahimi's protagonist. She cannot go outside without wearing a burqa. She was married to an absent person who was in the war. As mentioned earlier that in the process of selection and omission, Rahimi has omitted the strong catalytic and agentic women from the narrative just to show the stereotypical images of Afghan women and to depict them in stereotypical roles and nothing more than that. Thus, he has conformed to the representations of Afghan women in the western media, instead of shedding them. This seeming overlap and similarity is not a coincidence rather this is what was expected of him and that's why his work was selected, packaged and marketed because he has compromised his role as a transparent representor of the plights of Afghan people. He has not gone beyond or shed the stereotypes about Afghanistan, especially its women. This is the role expected of him by postcolonial theory as Timothy Mitchel (1998) has rightly said that postcolonial expects Re-Orientalists to turn their pens against the West but "re-Orientalists instead faithfully keep to the tradition of Orientalism in maintaining the 'world-as-exhibition'" (cited in Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes 2011: 7). But maybe Rahimi was unaware of such strong expectations and instead contributed to

the already bulking orientalist discourse—a discourse which has perpetuated Afghanistan as the ‘Other’.

Narratives like *The Patience Stone* have been used as a late justification of US occupation of Afghanistan. Taliban were to be blamed for the deteriorating situation of the country. They were depicted as the ultimate and common enemies who threatened their whole civilization and wellbeing. But after 18 years of war, the longest in US history, America is making peace with the same Taliban who have not deviated from their original stance an inch. It is very simple to think of two possibilities: either America was wrong back then when it attacked Afghanistan or America is wrong now by making truce with Taliban now. The news is in the air that the peace treaty is a clear victory of Taliban on the diplomatic front. Why is America pulling off its troops from Afghanistan and leaving the fate of Afghan women in the hands of Taliban once more? Aren't they the same ‘brown women’ whom they came to rescue from bad ‘brown men’? America misrepresented facts in order to make Taliban the sole responsible for the worse situation of women in the country but sensitive writers have documented this that Taliban policies rarely affected the majority of rural women. In a *New Yorker's* published article, it is stated that just outside the urban areas, “one sees raised paths subdividing wheat fields...in which men and women work together and the women rarely wear the burka; indeed, since they are sweating and stooping so much, their heads often remain uncovered. The Taliban has scarcely altered the lives of uneducated women, except to make them almost entirely safe from rape” (*The New Yorker*, 2000). America turned the country into a sex industry by playing the war on the female bodies. The subsequent section will discuss the role of sexualization in the workings of the imperial forces in the third world. Moreover, the orientalist view regarding male and female bodies and their sexualities which has been revisited by the novelist has also been analyzed below.

6.4 Sex and Sexualization of Oriental Bodies

In the novel, *The Patience Stone*, the aunt of the heroin runs a brothel and that is the only source of her income. The theme of prostitution has been repeatedly mentioned throughout the book. Even when some men, from one of the fighting factions, took refuge in the heroine's house and asked about her living alone, she told she was a widow and earned bread for herself and her two daughters by selling her body for the pleasure of men. It was this lie that brought the orphan youth to the house of the

woman for the second time. He was offering money to her in exchange of her body. The writer wants to show that many Afghan women have been pushed to such limits where they could not earn a respectable living—except through prostitution.

The question arises here is that what is the role of sexualisation, and what is the manner in which female bodies are circulated and represented in the recent workings of the imperial forces in the third world countries, where sex has become a lucrative industry. Chandra Mohanty calls for a response, regarding this issue, from feminism in the following words:

Imperialism, militarization, and globalization all traffic in women's bodies, women's labor, and ideologies of masculinity /femininity, heteronormativity, racism, and nationalism to consolidate and reproduce power and domination. Thus, it is anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, multiply gendered feminist praxis that can provide the ground for dismantling empire and re-envisioning just, humane and secure home spaces for marginalized communities globally. (2006)

In the War on Terror, particular formations of gender, race, nation and sexuality are brought into play, in order to invent and solidify practices of sexualization and racialization of the people, through disciplining and mobilizing third world women's bodies as a way of consolidating patriarchal and colonizing processes. These are the factors which has given a boost to the 'maid trade' in the international market, the sex tourism industry, and global militarized prostitution (Mohanty, 2006). Apart from this link to sexualization and war, the novel has also redefined the meanings of male and female bodies.

According to Khalid Hosseini, the way Atiq Rahimi describes the body of his heroine has presented the notion of woman as sexual being—a great Afghan taboo. He was successful in “not turning his heroine into the archetype of the saintly, asexual, maternal figure” (Ibid, 3). The novel has redefined the meanings of both male and female bodies. Life for women in Afghanistan is hard, but it is not a heaven for men either. The heroine says to her sang-e-sabour: “Sometimes I think it must be hard to be a man. No?” (p. 28). On another occasion she says: “When it's hard to be a woman, it becomes hard to be a man, too!” (Ibid, 34).

The young boy is a sex slave in the sense that the commander had kidnapped him as an orphan child and since then he is victim of his abuse. When the woman hears his story, she is outraged and tells her husband:

He keeps that poor little boy for his own pleasure! He kidnapped him when he was still a small child. An orphan, left to cope on his own on the streets. Kidnapped him and put a Kalashnikov in his hands, and bells on his feet in the evenings. He makes him dance. Son of a bitch! ... The boy's body is black and blue! He has burn scars all over—on his thighs, his buttocks ... It's an outrage! That guy burns him with the barrel of his gun! (p.31)

The custom of dancing boys has also been hinted at by Khalid Hosseini in *The Kite Runner* too. If Rahimi's novel is all about giving voice and face to women so this young boy, other 'dancing boys' have suffered more than the heroine but Rahimi failed to give him a voice. He even cannot speak straight as he stammers a lot.

Against such backdrop, as pointed out by Macleod, Oriental male and female do not correspond to the western gender standards because women are considered as passive, chaste and loyal while men are supposed to be active, brave and strong and such characteristics are hardly present in Orientals. Macleod also notes that Orientalism, East as whole is "feminized, deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and tempting; while the West becomes masculine – that is active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled and ascetic" (Macleod, 2007). Based on such notions, patriarchal and colonizing processes of nation-state involve the disciplining of male and female bodies. Laura Sjoberg describes the combining of familiar 'patriarchies' with reworkings of the place and meaning of gendered bodies, when she writes about the war in Iraq:

The story of the conflict was not only told in terms of American manliness, but in terms of the victory of American manliness over the mistaken and inferior masculinities of the Iraqi opponent. ... American masculinity (courage, benevolence and self-sacrifice) was better than Iraqi masculinity (defiance, lunacy and random violence). This sense of superiority of American masculinity may have created social space to allow the occurrence of the torture, which feminized the inferior masculinity. (Sjoberg, 2007)

Such ideas bring complexity into the notion of sexuality and gender. According to Zillah Eisenstein: 'There is female and male masculinity; and male

and female femininity' (Eisenstein, 2007). The heroine is in full control of her husband's body. She makes love to him and kisses him and also strokes his penis. She even has the capability to torture him. She confesses: "Now I can do anything I want with you" (Ibid 21). It's a time for her to take revenge for every bad thing that has happened to her because of this man. God has provided an opportunity for her to settle the score. She says: "He's keeping you alive so you can see what I'm capable of doing with you, to you. He is making me a demon... a demon for you, against you! Yes, I am your demon! In flesh and blood!" (Ibid, 21). Once she tried to kill him by removing the drip from his mouth and leaving him alone in that condition for a whole night (Ibid, 20). She tells him it would have been fine if "A stray bullet just finished you off, once and for all! (Ibid, 16). In the process of revealing her secrets, she becomes so bold and vivid that she openly abuses her husband and his family. "You men are all cowards!" (Ibid, 11), "One should not rely on men who have known the pleasure of weapons!", because "As soon as you have guns, you forget your woman." She criticizes men for shedding blood, that seems to be so much important to them, whether on wedding night or in the battlefield. She fails to understand the reason: "I have never understood why, for you men, pride is so much linked to blood" (Ibid, 14).

But even then she cares for him, changes him and put drops in his eyes, why? She must have been doing it for the role and duty assigned to her by the society, at first, but later on she does it for her own sake. She needs male protection. She confessed to her husband that you have no right to leave us alone, without any man. And this is the rhetorical vision offered by Atiq Rahimi that Afghan women need male protection. Even at the end of the novel when she kills her husband and escapes with the orphaned youth, it also shows her dependence on male. Rahimi may be calling for the Western military protection as well.

Furthermore, she is telling her secrets to him and thus unburdening herself, with every guarded secret revealed, she feels stronger. She treasures him as her "sang-e-sabour, which will explode one day, after having absorbed enough secrets and miseries, and that would be the day of her freedom.

6.5 Taliban and War on Terror in the Wake of 9/11

The novel is claimed to be giving political efficacy to Afghan women and an attempt towards their empowerment but it turns out to be a typical attempt of justifying the US-led forces to invade Afghanistan and rescue Rahimi's heroin and

women like her from the tyrannical regime of Taliban. Taliban became the common enemy who, as Laura Bush has put it her November 17, 2001 radio address to the nation, “would like to impose their ways on us . . . our culture is at risk . . .” [2001]. It was a moment of defining the ‘other’. As I have mentioned earlier that in the neo-colonial period the concept of orientalism has metamorphosed to refer to new constructions of the Orient. New representations of Islam and the Muslim world are dominating the Western public space. This Islamophobia is evident in the construction of the image of the terrorist as an ‘exotic other’. The central aspect of this stereotyping was to create a global alliance of public space against terrorism. It is a battle “between ‘us’ and ‘them’—a battle of cultures and values, where ‘our very way of life’ is under attack. The primary justification for war is basically culture (Northcott, 2004; Gow, 2004; Drury, 2006). the novel does not liberate or emancipate Afghan women, as it is often claimed but it is an attempt to justify US invasion. Rahimi has helped in the construction, reinforcement and circulation of the images of the orient in the process of Self-Orientalism.

Although there is no direct mention of Taliban in the novel but there is a war going on in the background, the terrors of which can be heard by the protagonist. It has been suggested that different factions of fighters are fighting among themselves for political control and dominance. The reader is well aware of the historical times. One of the fighting factions is that of Taliban which can be inferred from textual clues. The example of the woman wearing burqa each time she has to go out of her house. We know that Taliban made it compulsory for women to wear hijab or burqa. Sanctions like these have earned ill-fame for Taliban. But nobody mentions the Taliban’s policy to disarm the population and the security surveillance which enabled women after years to go out without the fear of being raped. This peace rapidly disintegrated after the Taliban’s exodus from Kabul. As reported by Agence France-Presse:

Just 10 weeks after the Taliban fled Kabul city, Afghans are already starting to say they felt safer under the now-defeated hardline militia than under the power-sharing interim administration that has replaced it. Murders, robberies and hijackings in the capital, factional clashes in the north and south of the country, instability in Kandahar and banditry on roads linking main centers are beginning to erode the optimism that greeted the inauguration of the interim administration (Agence France-Presse, 2002).

Sensitive writers have documented this that Taliban policies rarely affected the majority of rural women. In a *New Yorker's* published article, it is stated that just outside the urban areas, "one sees raised paths subdividing wheat fields...in which men and women work together and the women rarely wear the burka; indeed, since they are sweating and stooping so much, their heads often remain uncovered. The Taliban has scarcely altered the lives of uneducated women, except to make them almost entirely safe from rape" (The *New Yorker*, 2000).

Similarly, the incident where a group of fighters take shelter in the house of the protagonist and the conversation that ensues make it clear that this small group belongs to Taliban. There too, the usual harsh behavior associated with Taliban has been depicted. Then again, in the case of the young boy who has been kidnapped and kept as a dancing boy by the commander is a recurring stereotypical image that was depicted by Khalid Hosseini in *The Kite Runner* too. So, Rahimi is very clear in his agenda not to move from the status quo an inch away and stick to the stereotypical representation of Taliban and to consider them solely responsible for the worse situation of women in the country.

Available literature on the topic speaks to the fact that the powerful side of Afghan women is not only missing from most of the Western media representations but from fictional works on and from Afghanistan as well. These sources of information also present the simplified version of a vastly complicated problem, relieving America from any involvement in the deteriorating situation in the country. They simply put all the blame on Taliban. But if we look at the process of empowering Afghan women, we would be able to know that almost hundred years ago Amir Abdur Rehman Khan in a decree declared that women shall receive the rights granted to them in Islam. This decree also outlawed child and forced marriages. It aimed to protect women's rights by giving them right to inheritance, second marriage and divorce.

Women have been given equal rights with men by Afghanistan's constitution since 1923. In 1964 Afghan women got the right to vote. The process of empowering women continued slowly and gradually and reached a point when in 1990s, under the communist-backed governments; women occupied 70% of teaching posts, 50% of government jobs and 40% of medicals seats in Afghanistan.

But this process was reversed when US-supported *Mujahidin* conquered Kabul in 1992. They decreed such policies regarding women which won them no

favor, not even with the conservative Islamic countries. The US media has forgotten the fact that Afghan women have experienced this patriarchal control, of which the US army is trying to liberate them, started when Kabul was taken over by the US-backed mujahidin. In the rescue operation, the US Army, in just one month dropped more than half a million tons of bombs which is approximately 20 kg per Afghan citizen including women and children. But these bombings never liberated Afghan women, just made them flee their country to become refugees, adding to already high number of refugee camps. In the novel, the woman's in laws have all migrated from the area, leaving the woman alone with a sick man and two kids. This theme of refugees and migration is very much there in all Afghan Anglophone fiction. In the very first paragraph, the writer, while depicting the room, describes the curtain hanging there with the symbol of the migrating birds: "...and the two curtains patterned with migrating birds frozen mid-flight against a yellow and blue sky" (Ibid, 9). During the turbulence with Soviet Union and the civil war, 343 refugee camps were established across NWFP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Baluchistan, with an approximate 3.5 million population by 1992 (Khattak, 2002). Around 4 million people migrated to Iran and many more to other neighboring countries.

The role of the mullah has also been typically represented. The women consider him stupid for always telling her that she might have been reluctant in her duty towards her husband and neglecting his instructions. One day there was a bomb blast and firing and the woman happily predicts that the mullah would not visit us today because "[h]e's scared of stray bullets. He's as much of a coward as your brothers" (Ibid, 15). The same mullah is shown preaching jihad in the mosque. He is trying to convince and motivate people to fight. He says: "Today, your brother, our great Commander, is furnishing you with weapons that you may defend your honor, your blood, and your tribe!" In the street, men are shouting themselves hoarse: "*Allah O Akbar!*" Running: "*Allah O Akbar!*" Their voices fading as they near the mosque: "*Allah O ...*" (Ibid, 20). The mullah was not like this before. According to the woman, one could crack a joke with him but he has also changed with the new laws proclaimed by Taliban. She says: "He wasn't like that before; you could have a joke with him. But since you people declared this new law for the country, he's changed too. He's afraid, poor man" (Ibid, 20). It means that her husband was also a Talib who has fought for several years on many fronts for the name of God. The woman was married to him while he was gone to war and he came back after three years of their marriage. The woman while praying for his

health mentions: “Bring him back to life, God!” Her voice drops. “After all, he fought in your name for so long. For jihad!” (Ibid, 15).

The group of four Taliban that entered the woman’s house one night has been shown as looters and plunderers who have no moral code and ethics. They searched for valuable goods and one of them “crouching down to pull off the watch and the gold wedding ring. The third man rifles through the whole room—under the mattress and pillows, behind the plain green curtain, under the kilim ...” (Ibid, 25). And then again on the second encounter, she told the commander that she was a widow and earned her living by selling her body for the pleasure of men. That was her defense strategy against the militant which according to her had saved her from being raped. And she explains that to her sang-e-saboor:

“Forgive me!” she whispers. “I had to tell him that—otherwise, he would have raped me.” She is shaken by a sarcastic laugh. “For men like him, to fuck or rape a whore is not an achievement. Putting his filth into a hole that has already served hundreds before him does not engender the slightest masculine pride. Isn’t that right, my sang-e-saboor?... (Ibid, 43)

These examples clearly show what sort of image is being produced—depicting Taliban as the ultimate villains, the bad guys. The construction of this binary of good and bad Muslim is at the heart of re-Orientalist writings. Rahimi has discussed the routine of Taliban in war times:

Outside:
They shoot a while.
Pray a while.
Are silent a while. (Ibid, 54)

As Henrik (2003) has already been quoted saying that how terrorism is linked with Muslim world: “the “terrorist stigma” is explained by a form of “new barbarism” where explanations of political violence omit the political and economic interests as well as the context when describing violence and instead presents violence as a result of traits imbedded in Arabic culture” (591). Violence, terrorism and extremism are linked with Muslim world by Orientalists in their writing and Rahimi too manages to present Muslim with the same identity.

7. Conclusion

The critical analysis of the novel has revealed that contrary to claims of the writer and many of the reviewers that the novel is an excellent attempt of giving emancipation and identity to Afghan women, turns out to be a typical attempt of justifying the war on terror. The depiction of Afghan culture and people correspond exactly to the representations of the Orient by the orientalist. Based on the internalization of orientalist values, Rahimi has re-orientalized Afghanistan by using Western style and mood of thinking. Because of his residence and education in Europe, he has been more exposed to the stereotypical images of Afghan women that are passive, submissive, victims of war, oppression, violence and burqa-clad. He himself was away from his home country for more than 17 years which undermines his status as a transparent communicator of Afghan people and their plight. Moreover, the strategies of representation employed by Rahimi are also with their problematic aspects for example adopting popular imaginings and ruling out confessional tales as strategy of representation. Furthermore, he has misused his privileged location and under-represented Afghan women by committing historical and fictional omissions which are at the heart of re-Orientalism. Thus, it could be concluded that Rahimi has re-orientalized the Orient through the perspective of self-orientalization and has kept the binaries of the self and the other, the orient and the occident intact.

The western pop fiction has shown Afghan women as passive victims of war, violence and patriarchy. The portrayal of Afghan women depicted by Rahimi in *The Patience Stone* corresponds exactly to the dominant and stereotypical images of Afghan women in the west. He has reinforced and circulated these images in his novel. Rahimi treats his heroine with much more complexity than many writers, which is phrase worthy, yet he has not shed the stereotypical images of Afghanistan. Because of his privileged location which he has gained for being an expatriate and being an Afghan diasporic writer, the western readers, who do not have a firsthand experience of Afghan culture, will consider his representations authentic because these are coming from a person who is well aware of the culture and history of the region. For such readers who have no direct contact with the people of Afghanistan, whose only source of information is the media images fed to them, will see this novel endorsing the mass media images. Moreover, the educating aspect of fictional works can be seen from its wider readership across the globe. But findings of the analysis reveal that Rahimi has under-represented Afghan women and his

representations reinforce the dominant and stereotypical images of Afghan women in the popular fiction which has shown them as passive victims of war, violence, and political repression, to be liberated only and only by the western military intervention. Furthermore, Rahimi is presenting his heroines as a proxy for other millions of Afghan women which is objectionable. On the other hand, there is the heroine's Aunt whose character is agentic. Her story deserves better to be told but she is not even given a voice of her own. This selection and rejection in order to seek an authentic voice is itself an orientalist practice.

Political Efficacy, as a strategy of representation, also fails to legitimize the representation of Afghan people in *The Patience Stone* because Rahimi does not have any authentic way of knowing what values are emancipatory and what are not or what constitutes emancipation itself. Thus, the claim of giving voice to women and empowering them by such fictional representations turns out to be a typical attempt of justifying the ongoing US War on Terror. Rahimi has also used his Lived Experience for writing the novel. But this fact is worth mentioning that he fled from Afghanistan right after the Russian invasion and came back after the fall of Taliban. Thus, he has missed to observe a large portion of political and social changes that took place in his absence, which undermines his status as a representor of Afghan culture and people. Moreover, to fill this gap, he used popular imaginings as a strategy of representation, while confessional tales would have been a suitable strategy of representation in this scenario, which is impartial and less problematic.

Furthermore, Taliban have been presented as an 'exotic other' to the west. In fact, Afghanistan, as a whole, has been re-perpetuated as Orient—worthy of representations only, by the 'Orientalists' as well as the 'Orientals'. Such stereotypical and representational practices by the indigenous writers have been dubbed by critics as self-orientalism.

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