

**Courageous Women:**  
**A Study of Resilience of Women in Khaled Hosseini's Novel**  
*A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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**Abstract**

This research paper is based on Khaled Hosseini's daring effort to highlight and acknowledge the marginalization and subjugation of women in patriarchal society especially in Afghanistan. In his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), he introduced many female characters which are victimized, sexually harassed, suppressed by both male and female figures but in spite of all they challenged the brutality. They found their ways to live their lives and proved that if you have the courage to bear, can bear any calamity of the world and make your way to live life. There is a message for all those women of the world who are suffering from any type of male or female brutality that they can stand against all oppressions and suppressions. To be a woman is not bad, but to be a coward woman is really bad.

**Keywords:** marginalization, patriarchal society, sexually harassed, oppressions, suppressions

**Hosseini and His Novels**

Hosseini is a young Afghan-American doctor and writer. His contribution in fiction makes him prominent around the globe. His 1st novel is *The Kite Runner*, which represents the class system in the regime of Talbans in Afghanistan. He highlights the Shia-Sunni difference and makes the Hazara community subaltern within subaltern. His second novel is *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where the focus is on the female subaltern characters, which are marginalized doubly and triply by

the hands of male, system, culture and male-made society. There is surge of freedom awakening among the females. *And the Mountain Echoed* is his last novel which tells the story of a war-torn poor family who sells his daughter to a wealthy couple in Kabul to escape from hunger and starvation. In all three novels, male and female are in sorry plight but the females are in worse dilapidated condition and they are more subaltern.

### **Focus of This Paper**

This research paper is concerned with assessing the attitudes, opinions and conditions of the characters in which the characters act and they are forced to act. According to Waseem (2010), the major focus of the descriptive research is over “what is” and can only measure what already exists (p.185). She analyzes the major female characters who are made subaltern through the three decades in Afghanistan. The subaltern theory is applied to analyse the female characters. And can subaltern speak? Yes, of course.

### **Concept of Subaltern**

Theoretically this research work is based on Gramsci’s concept of subaltern and Spivak’s theory, Can subaltern speak? According to Gramsci, the unity of the ruling class is the unity of the various powerful groups of the state. They have common interests to gain the benefits. This organic unity among the classes takes the shape of the state. According to Hoare (1971) “The fundamental historical unity, concretely, results from the organic relations between state or political society and civil society”, p.201). In prison, he wrote about philosophy, history and politics. He declared that the subaltern were the subjected underclass in a society on whom the dominant power exerts its hegemonic influence. The subaltern is not a particular group of people of inferior ranks of status, subordinate, hence of power, rank authority action. The term subaltern is used for class, caste, gender, race, language and culture.

Spivak is the other major initiator in South Asia who contributed to analyzing the theory of subaltern studies. Her seminal work, *Can subaltern speak?* Brought the oppressed and suppressed classes to the light and the peasant uprising in India and the historiography of Indian

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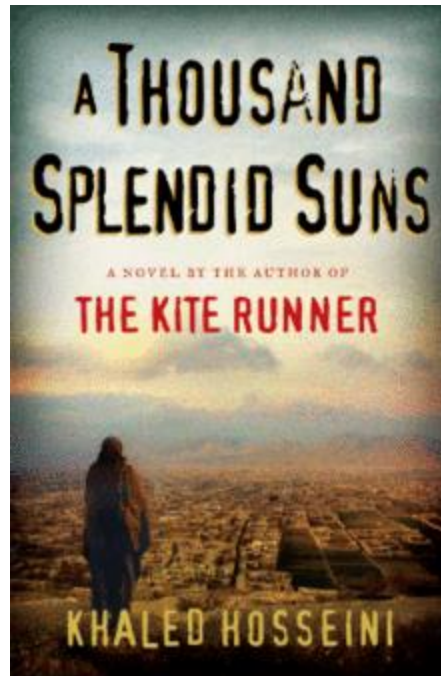
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people further fanned the theory. She claims that current histories of India were told from the colonizers' point of view and presented a story of the colony via the British administrators. Through the various journals, the subaltern study group wrote against the grain and restored history to the subordinated. In other words, to give common people back their agency.

Spivak questions, can subaltern speak? She says no, when subaltern speak, s/he remains no more subaltern. Many subaltern study critics like Dipesh Chakraborty suggest that it is really impossible to fully break from the western narrative. The subaltern history brings to light the previous covered histories, previously ignored events and the previously hidden secrets of the others. The subaltern are considered the others, this otherness is the part of modern fiction. These marginalized people are struggling to approach the center.

This present paper presents the content where the females are made subaltern. According to Krippendorff (200:18), content analysis is a useful technique to analyze the data and it brings valid inference from the text. The data were related to the attitude which women had to face. The study focuses on Nana, Mariam and Laila and the attitude of these females towards the male-made subaltern.

### *A Thousand Splendid Suns*



*A Thousand Splendid Suns* was written by Khaled Hosseini. It was published in 2007. The novel has four parts. Chapter 1 to 15 tells about Nana and Mariam, 16 to 26 the focal person is Laila, 27 to 46 tells the sisterhood of Mariam and Laila, the heroine of the novel, in the story. The researchers will use the secondary sources and websites that will deal the subaltern.

### **Nana**

Nana represents the first generation who is ostracized and marginalized. Mariam is declared “Harami” (illegitimate child) because her mother is made illegally pregnant by Jalil, a wealthy cinema owner. Mariam, a young daughter of Jalil, forced to marry an aged man. She is the submissive wife who tolerates the hardships and heinous attitude of her husband Rasheed, a chain smoker and older than Mariam. Laila is the last generation who is fall victim to the war and under age marriage and made “subaltern” by Rasheed and the Talbans who resist, revolt and avenge. The novel describes the struggle of females who escape from insubordination imposed upon them by the culture and society in Afghanistan. This paper portrays that both male and female are subaltern of postcolonial milieu in Afghanistan who struggle for freedom and try to resist in the repressive social structures. These characters do not succeed completely in bringing about

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tangible change in the society; still they struggle and search their identities through crime and transgression like Mariam and Laila.

Khaled Hosseini, Afghan-American writer, depicts the female characters whose condition remains the same, though the country is afflicted in the war on terror or the war of lords. Nana, Mariam and Laila are not able to upgrade their status, though they struggle to speak through resistance and agitation. The researcher will assess the resilience of female characters in the Afghan cultures which is war-ridden.

### **Important Questions**

During the study of *A Thousand splendid Suns* some important questions arise in the minds of the readers such as a) what kinds of gender subaltern attitude are faced by females in this novel, b) what are the attitudes of females towards the males, c) how do the differences between Mariam and Laila's upbringings affect their views on women's place in society?, and d) How do the lives of women change during the different regimes in Afghanistan?. The answer for all these questions can show ways by which the females are made subaltern in Afghan culture and how they resist and revolt against the oppressors and oppression.

This paper presents the following aspects of Hosseini's *A Thousand splendid Suns* in a comprehensive way; i) Afghan culture and females as subaltern, ii) Evaluation of suppressed women in postcolonial perspective, iii) The problems of females in various regimes, iv) Awareness and identity among the females, v) Subaltern speaks through resistance and revolt, vi) Struggle to participate in reconstruct modern Afghanistan.

### **Mariam**

Mariam has been told before by her mom that "like a compass needle that focuses north, a man's denouncing finger dependably finds a female" (Hosseini p.7). To Jalil, Nana resembled a 'mugwort', a weed, something you tear out and hurl aside. This weed was bound to a house which Nana called "rodent gap". Mariam and Nana lived in an enclosed house with high boundary walls without knowing anything that was going on outside the world. After Nana's passing, Mariam

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began to live in the place of her father. She felt desolate amidst a group of other family members who were total strangers to her. She felt as though she didn't have a place there, and recollected her mother's words, "I'm all you have in this world, Mariam, and when I'm gone you'll have nothing. You'll have nothing. You are nothing!" (Hosseini, p.28).

She was imposed on Jalil and his other three wives. Thus, they found a suitor, Rasheed, for her who was trice matured than she was. She would not like to marry such a man, who was at that point already married once, and she wept for help yet nobody listened to her. She was compelled to acknowledge and embrace this catastrophe of constrained marriage. Female as a piece of man's patrimony "is losing herself, female is lost" (de Beauvoir, p.3), since "she doesn't possess anything, female is not raised to the nobility of a man; she herself is a piece of man's patrimony, first her father's and after that her husband's". (de Beauvoir, p.93). The recognition of constrained marriage of young females with much more aged men, basically as a 'trade', is an important point that the novelist needs to be concerned about.

### **Life in Kabul**

Mariam and Rasheed reached Kabul in their home which was absolutely odd, and freighting to live in and that too with a man whom she didn't know by any stretch of the imagination. She started to cry and Rasheed would state to her irately, "That is one thing I can't stand, the sound of a female crying. I'm sad. I have no tolerance for it" (Hosseini, p.40). She was compelled to wear burqa (veil) which she never had worn. It resembled an enclosure to her and "the paddled headpiece felt tight and substantial on her skull, and it was peculiar seeing the world through a work screen" (Hosseini, p.65).

### **Pregnancy as an Image for Trust**

Following couple of weeks, she started to live a life of compromise with Rasheed. He took her to a visit to the city. She even got to be pregnant. One day when she was watching the snow falling, she recollected Nana saying that "every snowflake was a moan hurled by a bothered female some place on the planet... As an indication of how females like us endure. How unobtrusively

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we bear every one of that falls upon us." (Hosseini, p.59). Hosseini has utilized pregnancy as an image for trust all through the novel.

In the beginning, it was Nana who chose to live herself in her own ways. Then Mariam's pregnancy. Presently, Rasheed started to discover fault in all that she was accomplishing for him, in spite of the fact that she attempted her level best to execute his requests. The peak of his mercilessness towards her can be seen when "he pushed two fingers in her mouth and pried it open, then constrained the chilly, hard rocks into it. Mariam battled against him, murmuring, however he continued pushing the rocks in her upper lip nestled into scoff" (Hosseini, p.94). Her mouth was loaded with blood when Rasheed constrained her to chew the stones.

### **Laila**

From here, the account turns towards another significant character, Laila, who was a city produced character, lovely and youthful. She turned into another victim of Rasheed, both physically and mentally, and also sexually. Her parents were killed when a rocket hit their home; she came into the malignant hands of Rasheed who caught her by sending a man to her who weaves a false tale about her dearest Tariq's demise. She came to think about her pregnancy by Tariq that left no other choice for her however to acknowledge the Rashid's proposition to be engaged. She was only fourteen and Rasheed's desire for her was compounded by Mariam's position and esteem in the house. He keeps away from Mariam and misuse her as a harami (illegitimate) and dehati (villager). Mariam was a "dismal, hopeless female," (Hosseini, p.142) as Laila would state whom Rasheed used to beat her with his belt. In the novel, the dread of the spouse is revealed in these words:

Throughout the years, Mariam had figured out how to solidify herself against his disdain and censure, his criticizing and reviling. In any case, this dread she had had no influence over. Every one of these years and still she shuddered with dread when he was this way, scoffing, fixing the belt around his clench hand, the squeaking of the calfskin, the flicker in his red eyes. It was the dread of the goat, discharged in the tiger's enclosure, when the tiger first turns upward from its paws, starts to snarl. (Hosseini, p.145). On the other side, Laila was striking to test Rasheed's

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power. "Rasheed raised the belt and came at Mariam. At that point a shocking thing happened: The young female (Laila) thrust at him. She got his arm and attempted to drag him down, however she could do close to dangle from it. She succeeded in abating Rasheed's advance toward Mariam" (Hosseini, p.146). This nonstop beating and viciousness of Rasheed made Laila identify with Mariam and brought them two near one another. They started to love each other, and their unsuccessful fleeing from his home made Laila the casualty of Rasheed's hands also:

“Laila didn't see the punch coming. One minute she was talking and the following she was on all fours, wide-eyed and red-faced, attempting to draw a breath. It was as though an auto had hit her at full speed, in the delicate place between the lower lip of the breastbone and the paunch catch. She understood she had dropped Aziza that Aziza was shouting. She attempted to inhale again and could just make an imposing, gagging sound. Spill swung from her mouth (Hosseini, p.160). The most vital defining moment in the novel is when Rasheed grabbed Laila's throat and attempted to slaughter her in any case, rather, Mariam murdered him with her full power pass up a scoop on Rasheed's head. By offering herself to the police, Mariam made a give up of her life to the group of Laila. She grasped the passing boldly. The life had given her only interminable experiencing the hands of father to the remorseless spouse, and afterward, the general public. She was constantly beaten and made to comply. Indeed, even the last words that Mariam listened were, "stoop here, hamshira and look down". She has been given requests in her entire life and "one final time, Mariam did as she was told" (Hosseini, p.225).

### **Training of Afghan Females**

Instruction, especially the training of Afghan females, is another angle that Hosseini is managing in his novel. The expressions of Babi tending to Laila confirm this: Marriage can hold up, instruction can't. You are a, splendid young female. Genuinely, you are. You can be anything you need, Laila I know this about you. What's more, I additionally realize that when this war is over, Afghanistan will require you as much as its men, possibly more. Since a general public has no possibility of accomplishment if its females are uneducated, Laila no possibility (Hosseini, p.72).

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Laila's father longed for the free Afghanistan where females can inhale as openly as men. For quite a while the happening to socialism made the life of females free. Again, in the expressions of Bibi: Women have dependably had it hard in this nation, Laila, however they're most likely more free now, under the communists, and have a bigger number of rights than they're than they've ever had before... It is great time to be a female in Afghanistan. Also, you can exploit that, Laila. Obviously, females' flexibility here is likewise one reason individuals out there waged war in any case (Hosseini, p.86). But the majority of the Bibi's convictions and thoughts about the females training in Afghanistan were demonstrated wrong, since now under the Taliban run this nation, known as the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan', Afghanistan endured more than some other government some time recently. They have made the laws and guidelines that must be acknowledged in at any rate, and among them one is, "Young females are illegal from going to schools. All schools for young females will be shut instantly. Females are illegal from working" (Hosseini, p.166). The circumstance in Afghanistan became worse. Females were totally banned from training and different exercises, which made them confined in their homes. By the Rasheed's incomplete mentality towards Azizia, we can comprehend that the young female tyke was not welcome in Afghanistan. He needed her to ask on roads and sent her to halfway house.

### **Women's Plight**

Women, throughout the ages are struggling to achieve their rights in Afghanistan. The situation in the urban areas is better but it is complicated and pitiable in the rural areas, they are not allowed to enjoy the basic rights, they work in crop fields, on the lands and remained with the animals. They lend hand in agriculture but their income totally depend on the males. They are ordered to wear burqa (veil). They are not allowed to wear makeup, even they are considered the property of males. The females are sold and bought as the bride and they are commodified (Marsden, 1998).

Afghan women are oppressed but they resist revolt and avenged. A Thousand Splendid Suns is the exploration from subaltern to equal gender. Nana is the deprived generation who points out the follies of males before the females but does not resist. Mariam is declared the "harami, the bastard, and she with her mother are excluded from the society and both lived in kolba, which is separated and marginalized place where no one is in their neighbor. Laila is the major resisting

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force who motivates the previous and forthcoming generation to revolt against the patriarchal society which made them subaltern. In the novel female-subaltern speak through resistance and revolt. Khaled Hosseini challenges Spivak's theory of subaltern, can subaltern speak? She says "NO" but Hosseini says "Yes" and subaltern's voices are heard.

## To Conclude

To conclude, this paper in hands points out the shortcomings of the man-made system and provides information about the males' attitude in Afghanistan. The females are considered the creatures of the lowest ranks. They are kept with the animals and excommunicated from the mainstream. The researcher will also collect information about the cultural background of subalternity in Afghanistan and the awakening spirit among the females who are resisting and revolt against the center. The researcher hopes that male will review on their attitude and take the female as the equal gender.

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