

Feminism in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

<p>Dr. E. V. Ramkumar Associate Professor of English KARE, Krishnankoil drvramvani@gmail.com</p>	<p>Ms. Suba M.Phil. Scholar Dept. of English KARE, Krishnankoil</p>
---	--

Abstract

Khaled Hosseini, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* introduces many female characters who are victimized, sexually harassed and suppressed by both male and female figures, and in spite of all that suffering imposed on them, they challenged the brutality. This paper analyzes Mariam's life after she marries Rasheed and later the life of Laila, the young girl who comes to their marriage, and is cunningly forced to become Rasheed's second wife. The paper talks about the real unbearable condition of women in Afghanistan, who have been discriminated against before, during and after the decades-old conflict. The findings reveal that the portrayal of Afghan women in the novel does correspond with the images of Afghan women portrayed in the Western Media. Hosseini's prime focus is to raise his voice against injustice done to women and the need for the humanitarian spirit of people in the world to bring about a change in the living condition of women in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, male domination, subaltern, sexually harassed, brutality, women's suffering.

Introduction

The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is set against the background of Afghanistan's recent history. It portrays two Afghan women Mariam and Laila, born two decades apart, who are brought together through a series of largely tragic events. Khaled Hosseini is one of the best-known contemporary writers. His first novel is called *The Kite Runner*, and then he wrote *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Women in Afghanistan have been going through gender equality issues in its severest form for decades. The issues of feminism and gender equality have been raised through the lives and characters of Mariam and Laila. During the Afghanistan war people suffered from Soviet military forces, and the conditions of women in Afghanistan became increasingly horrible. Forced marriages, lack of any kind of freedom, loss of identity, limited space, mental torture perpetrated towards the Afghan women were the issues that were of concern to many feminists across the globe. Afghan women are not allowed to accept liberal

ideas and equal rights. The paper also aims at bringing out the suppressed sufferings of the women of Afghanistan and create a vision of women's empowerment through the characters of Mariam and Laila, the protagonists of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Familial Approach in Khaled Hosseini *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

A Thousand Splendid Suns and *The Kite Runner* focus on the family background relationship between a father and a son and mother and daughter. Hosseini mainly focuses on relationship. His first novel is *The Kite Runner*. This focuses on the relationship between a father and a son, the father trying to help the boy to understand right from wrong. The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* switches to the relationship between mother and daughter.

The novel presents a heartbreaking portrayal of the women characters, Nana and her daughter Mariam as well as Laila and her daughter Aziza, with the central characters being Mariam and Laila between whom the circumstances create a mother-daughter relationship, a bonding which ultimately becomes a weapon to combat patriarchy.

Women are supposed to be as holders of men's honor or Names, thus they stay inside the domestic sphere and are supposed to be silent and voiceless (Kiddle, 39).

The family, the tribe and ultimately the nation are invested in women. This paper presents the restrictions faced by women when they sought education, lack of which restricted their great potential in the male-dominated world.

Nana comes from a poor family, which further complicates things. Nana's life has made her turn into a hard woman. It's hard to look at her story and not feel compassion for her struggle. Soviet rule added to the suffering of the women of Afghanistan. With all her troubles, she raised Mariam all by herself; most wouldn't have done that. Laila had much love for her daughter; Laila visited Aziza in the orphanage. Mariam and Laila feel like mother and daughter. They have suffered terrible brutality from their husband. In this novel these two characters are shown to have good relationship. Mariam thought of Laila compassionately. "I'm going to be a mother," she said. Then she was laughing to herself, saying it over and over relishing the words (Hosseini, 88).

Women in Afghan Society

This is case with most of the Women in Afghanistan. They were treated as objects, not human beings. Mariam constantly faced problems and blamed the circumstances that were out of her control. Mariam rightly imputes Nana's suicide and her forced marriage to Rasheed. After marriage, even though Mariam shifts to Kabul, the most liberal place in Afghanistan, life fails to

liberate her; Rasheed turns out to be an egotistic patriarch. When Mariam suffers continuous miscarriages, Rasheed turns into a deranged tyrant of domestic violence, leaving Mariam a passively suffering, silent, reclusive woman. In a most disturbing scene, Rasheed forcefully makes Mariam eat stones which reveals the kind of atrocities a woman faces when she fails to produce a child, and in this case, Rasheed was also obsessed with begetting the male child. Moreover, it is Rasheed who compels his wife to wear the burqa much before the Taliban makes it compulsory for all women to wear. “This brought the realization that there can be no justice for me, as a Muslim woman as long as patriarchy is justified and upheld in the name Islam. The prevailing interpretations of the sharia do not reflect the values and principles that I hold to be at the core of my faith”. (Hosseini, 629)

Laila sees Mariam as her mother, one who is very affectionate and motherly. As her own mother is not stable and she is almost all the time in mourning, as both her sons have died in the civil war in Afghanistan. So, Laila's idealism and independence are challenged when she decides to marry Rasheed in order to give her unborn child a father through Tariq.

Rasheed often insults, mocks and threatens them. Hosseini depicts that it is not easy for Mariam to bear Rasheed's insults and his way of treating her. “It wasn't easy tolerating him talking this way to her, to bear his scorn, his ridicule, his insult, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat. But after four years of marriage, Mariam saw clearly how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid. She lived in fear of his shifting moods, his volatile temperament, his insistence on steering even mundane exchanges down a confrontational path that, on occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks, and sometimes not”. (Hosseini, 97-98)

During the Taliban's rule, strict Islamic laws were reinstated in Afghanistan. The instructions issued to women reveal the astonishing injustices perpetrated on women. “Attention women: you will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a Mahram, a male relative. If caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home... Listen. Listen well. Obey. Allah-u-Akbar”. (Hosseini, 270-71) It feels as if the common Afghans are constantly being observed and monitored and even a slight diversion from the absurd diktats of the dictatorial regimes will result in their harshest punishment. Rosemarie Skaine, *The Women of Afghanistan Under the Taliban* said that,

While much of the Afghan population suffers under the Taliban, women bear specific, unrelenting and often violent adversity, including the denial of basic human rights, veiling, seclusion and segregation (Skaine, 7).

She represents the hope for the future in Afghanistan, because she is the strong woman who can outlast every evil man who tries to take away the ones she loves and lives for. From then on, she along with Mariam bears the domestic violence and insults from him. Laila undergoes the crudest form of humiliation at the hands of Taliban. The author portrays Laila as a strong woman character in his novel. "Almost ten years. But for a moment, standing there with Tariq in the sunlight, it was as though those years had never happened. Her parents' death, her marriage to Rasheed, the killing, the rockers, the Taliban, the beatings, the hunger, even her children, all of it seemed like a dream, a bizarre detour, a mere interlude between that last afternoon together and this moment". (Hosseini, 333) Her presence and support only inspire Mariam to gain courage to fight back and ultimately kill Rasheed. The following statement given by the judge is a clear indication of the attitude of Muslim men towards women. At the close of the novel, Laila finally, finds the life she has been dreaming of. Mariam and Laila find solace and happiness in each other's company. Their bond gives them freedom from pain not only physically, but emotionally by trusting each other.

Conclusion

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* two generations of characters are brought harmoniously together by the tragic sweep of war, where personal lives, the struggle to survive, to raise a family and to find happiness, are inextricably woven from the history playing out around them. Mariam realizes what a fool she has been. She kills in order to save her daughter-like Laila from death. For the first time that she decides the course of her own life. At no point does it appear that Laila or Mariam have any legal rights. But Hosseini carefully portrays both Laila, whose parents raised her with a greater sense of entitlement and privilege, and Mariam, whose mother taught her to endure by taking control of the conditions under which they lived to the extent that they possibly could, and he has very cleverly shown feminism and activism on their part to some extent. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* the story of Afghanistan includes the description of the role and place of women in Afghan society. Khaled Hosseini has very sympathetically, and sensitively examined the condition of women in Afghanistan, and women in general in this novel.

Works Cited

Kedde, Nekki.R, *Women in the Middle East: A History*, Book One, Princeton University press, 2006.

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. 2007. London: Bloombury, 2013. Print.

Hossini, Ziba Mir. "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic law and feminism". *Critical inquiry*, vol.32, No. 4, summer 2006. Web

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:5 May 2019

Dr. E. V. Ramkumar and Ms. Suba, M.Phil. Scholar
Feminism in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Skaine, Rosemarie. *The Women of Afghanistan under the Taliban*. 2002. North Carolina:
McFarland & Company, Inc, 2002. Web
