

FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVES OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN KHALED**HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS***

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'Feminism' in the contemporary context became a culture rather than a movement. It deals with the political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism, though attained equal consideration in the field of work, it is still in the clutches of patriarchy in the form of sexual abuse, harassment, acid attacks etc., In Afghanistan, the feminism is in its primitive stage and the men are given license to do whatever they want to their women. Khaled Hosseini, being born in Kabul, Afghanistan, took a stand for his women and described the brutal realities of their life. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* weaves the contrasting lives of Mariam and Laila through a common needle Rasheed in the patriarchal society of Afghan. Like Dickens, Hosseini through his pen wanted to reform the Afghan society.

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Introduction

Contemporary society has attained its glory in the fields of missile, artificial intelligence, also the growing social media, thousands of inventions and discoveries. Despite all this, women are buried deep under the rug by the so-called chauvinistic attitude. It results in the heartless abuse of a two months old girl infant to the adult women. Women can't work peacefully in their office; they can't travel safely in buses and cabs. They always need men to be their savior in the dynamic context. This paper is aimed to explore the contemporary sufferings of women through Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

A Thousand Splendid Suns was published in 2007 by Khaled Hosseini. He is an Afghan American writer. It is his best-selling novel which is followed by his debut best-seller The Kite Runner. In A Thousand Splendid Suns Hosseini sets the novel against the backdrop of Afghanistan war and its recent history. Hosseini, being an Afghan immigrant, his novels exposes the brutal treatment endured by him and his people, especially the life at stake situation for women. Hosseini's family were forced to move out of their country by the Soviet invasion. Hence, they settled in America. His novels are widely accepted and read all over the world, the recognition is appreciable.

Hosseini, weaves the lives of two women who belonged to different generations with different brought up and ideologies are united with a single twist of their fates. Mariam and Laila, who represents the suffering of women in the last generation and the contemporary generation.

Nana meant, that a harami was an unwanted thing; that she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance. (Hosseini 6)

Mariam, an unwanted child who refuses to recognize the fact that she is an 'harami' or an unwanted child. Throughout the novel, she is in the search of love, acceptance and a sense of belongingness. Unfortunately, it becomes a forbidden fruit for her. After the birth of Mariam, Nana, Marian's mother came to live in the outskirts of Gul Daman. Jalil, Mariam's father had an illegitimate affair with Nana, one of his head servants, it resulted in the pregnancy of Nana and she was thrown out of Herat. Jalil was one of the wealthiest men of Herat, also has the independence to marry three wives but he can't accept Nana and Mariam. He also defended his act by saying that Nana forced her upon him. In the patriarchal society, men never accept their flaws or faults. They always associate the wrong-doings with the weaker sex.

Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam. (Hosseini 11)

The sudden death of Nana takes Mariam to the reality of her illusioned life. Jalil's wives planned to give Mariam's hand in marriage to a rich widower, Rasheed, whereas her half-sisters Saiden or Naheed same age as Mariam attending Mehru school in Herat and also plans to attend the Kabul University. The desperate pleadings of a fifteen-year-old Mariam to Jalil was heart-wrenching yet She was given in marriage to Rasheed. In the beginning, Rasheed was gentle, affectionate and a caring husband, who is considerate of his wife's feelings and welfare but later turns into a gender-obsessed brute. Rasheed's love for Mariam turns into hatred when he finds that she can't give him a boy child.

The theme of Mary O'Brien's *The Politics of Reproduction* (1981) is that men control women's reproductive process through medical, social and cultural structures. O'Brien argues that women would reclaim this control and positively affirm the role of mothering.

In the conventional arranged marriage, women are not allowed to make decisions of them own, initially it was their father then their husband. Being a strong follower, Rasheed insists Mariam to wear burqa in public.

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. (Kedde 39) Rasheed is completely immune to the terrible heartbreaks endured by Mariam due to her continuous miscarriages. He also started to mistreat and criticize her for cooking and cleaning. It finally led to the physical abuse of Rasheed to Mariam.

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)

For all his brutal treatment, Mariam used only one suggestion her mother taught her "Endure"(Hosseini 28).

Contrast to Mariyam's family, Laila's brought up with love from her family and taught to be treated as equal with the male subordinate. Laila's father taught her the importance of education and asked her to pursue it. But fate takes a toll, unites her with Rasheed. He persuades Laila to marry him and he even compares Laila with Mariyam. 'You ... are a Benz. A brand-new, first-class shiny Benz' (Hosseini 216). The love in Rasheed takes a turn, when Laila gives birth to Aziza, a girl who is not his in the first place. This results in the bonding of Laila and Mariyam. They find solace in each other's company. This situation is described in the statement by Simon de Beauvoir, in his *Second Sex* (1988), 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'. Feminism differs from one country to another. In Afghanistan, women must be submissive to their men. They are not allowed to express their freedom of thought.

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 you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home... Girls are forbidden from attending school.

All schools for girls will be closed immediately...If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death. Listen. Listen well. Obey. Allah-u-akbar.

(Hosseini 398-399)

The second male child Zalmai, was welcomed, cherished and pampered by Rasheed whereas when Aziza was born, Rasheed refused to even lift her. 'The basic view is that Western Civilization is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father) that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted'(Abrams 125). At the end of the novel, both Mariyam and Laila's relationship developed in the form of mother and daughter. Their love exceeds the brutal treatment they endured from their husband Rasheed. Mariyam killed Rasheed when he tried to strangle Laila and also happily accepted the death verdict from the judge. This paper unraveled the brutal and detestable treatment towards Afghan Women by their men and also gives hope for the empowerment of women welfare.

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