

Dependence of Women Characters in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract: *In this paper a study has been undertaken to discuss the struggles and oppressions faced by the female characters in the novel A Thousand Splendid Suns. This paper analyses how the women characters, Mariam and Leila search for their identities. This paper uses gender studies as a tool to analyse the novel. Khaled Hosseini's novel A Thousand Splendid Suns centres on the friendship between Mariam and Leila wives of the same man, Rasheed. This novel describes the daily life of the Afghan women. Khaled Hosseini has taken the last thirty years of that country's history of war and deals with it on an intimate scale through these two characters. Women are alienated in a remote place; they are forced to marry aged men and their ways of dressing are restricted. Women's mobility is limited and women are treated unfairly through Polygamy. It deals with several dark themes like violence, war and sexual, psychological and physical violence. A Thousand Splendid Suns describes the Soviet war followed by the Taliban rule. This novel is written from a third person's point of view. In this novel, he speaks about the true face of the Afghan society. The objective of this paper is to analyse the position of women against this war background.*

Keywords: *Oppression, Alienation, Taliban rule, Polygamy.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

This research is a feminism analysis which aims to reveal the kinds of gender discrimination faced by women, and the attitudes of women towards gender discrimination in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The struggle and oppression in the lives of two Afghan women are shown in this novel. Centers on the friendship between Mariam and Leila, the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* describes the cruelty and problems faced by Afghan women in their daily life. With the setting of Afghanistan, the novelist has taken the last thirty three years of that country's tumultuous history of war and oppression and told it on an intimate scale through these two characters.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Afghan American literature is a relatively new area of study and is the body of literature produced by the writers of Afghan descent who have immigrated to America. The predominant genre in Afghan American Literature is Life Writing, as people in diaspora, retain memories of their homeland by recording their life experience through literature. Afghan Americans, through writing, situate life histories based on specific individual experience, with their ancestral lineage as Afghan, as well as the idea of a collectively shared identity politics within multicultural America. Afghan diaspora is the single largest refugee group in the world and some of the prominent Afghan American writers are Khaled Hosseini, who is best-seller authors.

3. DISCUSSION:

Gender discrimination is a term to describe an unequal treatment that is based on gender. Despite the fact, that these days in maximum components of the sector gender equality has been accomplished, numerous troubles of gender discrimination nonetheless exist in all components of existence, starting from cultural, political to economical fields. Gender discrimination can be in verbal abuse, violence, threats, humiliation, and intimidating behaviour or conduct.

Gender discrimination is followed in many countries, considered one among them is Afghanistan. A 2011 survey by the Thomas Reuters Foundation (in Khan, 2012: 1-2) discovered that Afghanistan is the most dangerous region for women. Women face many obstacles, violence, or even humiliation that results in about 87% of women undergoes abuse and violence in many forms.

Afghan people loved their country very much even though they suffer under the gender discrimination. Some women accept the discrimination and some others struggle against it. Women's perspectives towards the gender discrimination that they undergo play a vital role in changing their lives forever.

Khaled Hosseini was born in Northern Kabul, Afghanistan. He is a novelist and also a practicing Physician, currently residing in California. His first novel is *The Kite Runner* which has highly praised by the readers and it is translated into play. It has released as a Hollywood film. His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has printed in Gregorian calendar in 2007. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, describes the nation's condition as a result of decades of turmoil on women. He crafts the story of two strong Afghan women of different ages from different areas whose lives intersect for a while. The novel deals with Afghan history since post Soviet war till Taliban rule than matches up with the plot of Hosseini's critically acclaimed initial novel, *The Kite Runner*.

Khaled Hosseini in his novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has delineated the pitiable conditions of women in Afghan country. The author has very well represented the character within the novel. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* centres on the friendship between Mariam and Laila. The novel is split into four parts which focuses on Mariam's life as an illegitimate child in the first part, continued with Leila in the second half who is supposedly a generation younger than Mariam, and also the relationship between the two women, in the third part. The last part, deals with their lives in separate paths. The novel follows the lives of two women characters Mariam and Laila who struggle due to the violent nature of their husband. Both the women characters are treated badly and are abused physically, sexually and emotional. Their chained sufferings make them to feel desperate in their lives. Stress, fear and anxiety drive Mariam to murder her own husband and Laila to flee the country.

As in Afghan society, women are not allowed to have education. Mariam studies at home tutored by Mullah Faizullah. She learns Koran to read and write. As she was an illegitimate daughter, Mariam was called as 'Harami'. After her mother's death, 16years old Mariam was married to an age old man Rasheed. Initially Rasheed took care of Mariam with much love but later he revealed his true colours as a torture husband and orders her to follow the paths of his wife. According to the law of Afghanistan, women are forced to wear the burqa but contradictionally Mariam never wears burqa before her marriage. But after marrying Rasheed, she was forced to dress herself in burqa as her husband Rasheed tells that "a women's face is her husband's business only". (69) Mariam wears burqa for the first time out of her home she finds it difficult to move and also feels suffocative.

Rasheed married his neighbour Laila as he finds Mariam as infertile for not giving birth to a baby. In Afghan society if a lady commit affair with other man she must be killed and her child has to suffer this shame throughout his or her life. As Laila was beloved with Tariq's child so she agrees to marry Rasheed as she wanted society to acknowledge the child as Rasheed's instead of calling "Harami". When the Taliban came to power, they officiated strict and merciless rules for women which include beating women who laughed in the public and who avoid to wear burqa. All colleges and schools were closed for women and they also were not allowed to work outside their homes. Laila could not bear the confinement of women within four walls. Women suffer physically and mentally through Taliban rule. Desperately, were supposed to they must surrender to their husbands. There prevailed a condition where the Afghan women were treated like insignificant creatures that were just there to reproduce the future generation.

All the women characters in the novel struggle in their life. Rasheed abuses Laila when he finds that she delivered a girl baby. In Afghanistan, women's value has been measured by her ability to bear the boy child. Laila obeys her husband as he usually warns herself and the girl child to stay inside houses. Mariam would have not gained strength to fight against Rasheed if she had not gained confidence and affection from Leila. Mariam proves that she is equal to a thousand splendid suns. It is a powerful novel that touches the reader's heart. In this novel women are treated very badly with very little or no respect in the society. Despite all these hardships, Mariam and Leila were able to overcome these struggles and lives in a satisfactory and successful ways in the end. After the attacks on the United States on 11 September, 2001, Afghan women suddenly gained high visibility in the world. Many a of literary works number novels and fiction were written about Afghan women placing them as the centre of the story.

Hosseini beautifully portray of the culture that exist in Afghanistan. The readers are enables to understand the complexities of the Taliban rule through the novel. In Afghanistan, women have no right to walk alone and they always had to cover their face. These rules are mentioned in the *Koran* for the well beings of human beings. But religion distorted all these rules and made human life more complex especially in the case of women in Afghanistan. The women characters in this novel suppress all their feelings. Mariam endures a lot while Laila tries to raise her voice. From this novel one can understand that the human beings are able to suffer only to certain extend. But at last surely they will react and this is evident in the case of Mariam. She suffers a lot and at last she murders Rasheed.

Hosseini's second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is described from a third person's view. His novel speaks out and reveals the true face of the society. In the novel, both women were face lot of difficulties and struggles in their life that every woman faces in Afghan society. In some months since its release, the novels has garnered a plethora of positive reviews: *The Kite Runner* he uses a melodramatic plot to convey vividly the many aspects of love and the ways people sacrifices themselves for those they hold dear. With *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini has shown that he doesn't intend to be a one-hit wonder. It will be interesting to see where he goes from here. (Lisa See)

4. CONCLUSION:

In several areas of Afghanistan, ladies are often taken out of school when they hit puberty. Cultural factors associated with allowing women to school, reluctance to send girls and boys to the same school after third grade, similarly the perceived and real security threads related to girls walking to school and attending classes all contribute to slowing down the enrolment of girls in school. Likewise, the enormous lack of female teachers, who are fundamental in a country where girls cannot be taught by a man after a certain age, is having a negative impact on girls' education. While progress has been made since the fall of the Taliban, women are still struggling to see their rights fulfilled.

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