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LIVING ON THE EDGE: WOMEN IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

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ABSTRACT

"A man's accusatory finger always discovers a woman like the pointer of a compass points north." This statement exemplifies the female power disparity in Afghan society. He said that the struggle and carnage in Afghanistan, which has endured more than 50 years, has taken a toll in terms of both physical and human casualties. It also caused an almost permanent drastic shift in his socio-cultural framework. Dealing with the combined conquest of and oppression has been a challenging living. The mentioned novel by Khaled Hosseini chronicles the narrative of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila who are both victims of patriarchy and married to Rasheed. The male binary oppressed Hosseini's female characters until they struggled for their identities. Both male and female characters persecute, sexually harass, and suffocate the female characters, yet they fight the violence, nevertheless. There is a reminder for all women worldwide who are sufferers of female or male brutality that they may resist tyranny and subjugation. In the context of this work, this research project contends that the violence and conflict in Afghanistan during a critical moment in its history worsened women's oppression. This study article tries to present an alternate view of Afghan women's situations to the often-clichéd depictions by conceptualizing Afghan experiences of women in a specific set of political, sociological, and cultural components.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Afghan women, Oppression, Victimization, Gender Roles, Individuality, Marginalization

INTRODUCTION

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American author, was known for his lyrical portrayals of Afghanistan.

The novel "A Thousand Splendid Suns" strives to highlight connections between Mariam and Laila, two main female characters who battle in their own countries with political instability, social injustice, and persecution. Khaled Hosseini's writing approach in the novel is both sympathetic and repulsive. He sympathizes with those who are afflicted by the conflict. He does this largely via the use of two literary elements: symbolism and imagery. The core topic of the novel is women's rights, notably during the Taliban regime. Mariam and Laila were born into non-authoritarian families. The execution of

Mariam in the stadium exemplified the unfairness of her treatment. The study paper delves into the novel's feminist underpinnings.

Khaled Hosseini's work "A Thousand Splendid Suns" is an important tale that highlights the plight of the women of Afghans who have survived in the crippling shadows of patriarchal tyranny and conflict. In light of Hosseini's work, this study seeks to show how patriarchy and ongoing conflict have exacerbated women's subjugation in Afghanistan. However, it is important to note at the outset that the aim of this study is not for homogenizing Afghanistan or Afghan female in any way. It is a fallacy that has grown common in any intellectual or non-academic discussion on Afghanistan. In no way are Afghan women a homogeneous group.

There are different intersections, such as economy, race, provincial belonging, or historical context, through which Afghan men and women, like their counterparts in other areas of the world, must navigate. This study focuses on how Afghanistan's unique historical conditions, in the form of wars and conflicts, have delivered excruciating encounters for its women for over a half-century.

In the novel, women appear to be the true victims. The extended conditions of Afghanistan's conflict have taken a tremendous toll on people's lives and caused great pain and damage to the country. Children and women are always the most vulnerable victims in every conflict because of their fragile social situations. In a nation like Afghanistan, where patriarchal practices are as unyielding and rigid as the terrain, one can only wonder about the plight of Afghan women when these traditions are further reinforced by a lengthy battle. According to the storyline of Hosseini's work, Afghan women have been sufferers of both patriarchy and the horrific scenario of violence that has now destroyed Afghanistan for over a half-century. The patriarchal culture imposes on women the concept of 'the ideal femininity,' which must be reached in whatever circumstances or scenario. As represented in the novel, in the Afghan community, it is the women who must foster patriarchal ideas. The patriarchal culture ensures that women achieve the pinnacle of these goals. This idea becomes a primary tool of oppression against women. Sexual predation and brutalization of women appear to be common in Afghan society in the pursuit of honour and idealized womanhood. This study focuses on how Afghanistan's unique historical conditions, in the form of wars and conflicts, have delivered excruciating encounters for its women for over a half-century.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Afghanistan: One year of Afghan Rule" by **Hameed Hakim¹⁴²**

This report by Hameed Hakimi gave further background information on the current state of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan along with Afghanistan's history over the last half-century. It also illustrates a propensity for external powers to assist their allies in Afghanistan. Even if the nation does not revert to open violence, there is no conclusion in sight to the Afghan people's suffering, which was essential for the research.

"The Kite Runner" by **Khaled Hosseini¹⁴³**

This novel is rich in local lore, history, and the realities of life under the kite-banning Taliban regime. This novel depicts the daily life in the land of the Taliban and the social condition of the women and children during their regime. This novel helped in the in-depth understanding of the daily life struggles and the patterns of social discrimination during the Taliban Rule of the Afghan people.

"A Political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan" by **Kakar Mohammad Hassan¹⁴⁴**

This book talks about the Major Ethnic Groups that reveal how the groundwork was set for Afghanistan's development as a nation-state along with the execution of modernization projects. This piece of work provided a detailed history of the political scenario of the Taliban and the devastation caused in the life of the commoners; this was very crucial for the research study.

Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab¹⁴⁵

In this article, the writer discusses the condition of women and girls one year after the Taliban took over Afghanistan. This article speaks about the recent oppression and subjugation faced by Afghan women in terms of education, assertion, and workplace. This provides a piece of insight

¹⁴² Hakim.H., Afghanistan: One year of Afghan Rule, 2022

¹⁴³ Hosseini.K., The Kite Runner, 2003

¹⁴⁴ Hassan. M. K., A political and Diplomatic History of Afghanistan, 1920

¹⁴⁵ Ochab. U. E., 2020

into information and connection about the past and presents the plight and sufferance faced by women in the Taliban regime.

“A Thousand Splendid Suns: Rhetorical Vision of Afghan Women” by Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed¹⁴⁶

This piece of work analysed the victimization of women during the Taliban era and vividly portrayed their sufferance and struggle. This research paper also portrayed the concept of Feminism brought about by the actions of the women against the Taliban rules and regulations. This piece of work crucially helped in the scrutiny of the characters of “Mariam and Laila” in a more elaborate form.

“Courageous Women: A Study of Resilience of Women in Khaled Hosseini’s Novel: A Thousand Splendid Suns” by Muhammad Imran Joyia¹⁴⁷

This piece of work is centered on Khaled Hosseini’s courageous attempt to emphasize and recognize women’s marginalization and oppression in a patriarchal culture, particularly in Afghanistan. The writer’s chronological sequence discusses the evolution of the power of Afghan women throughout the narrative and the influence the interactions with the male characters had on the attitude and behaviours towards the women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Research Methodology used in the paper is ‘Qualitative’. Qualitative research methodology is used to comprehend people’s views, experiences, attitudes, behaviour, and interactions, and the qualitative technique is applied. It produces non-numerical data. Integrating qualitative data into intercession studies is a research technique gaining traction across disciplines. This research paper has used journals, articles, and books for in-depth research and study about the mentioned topic.

The current study seeks to illuminate not just the novel’s descriptive aspects, but also the novel’s social and legal context. As a result, the following questions should be addressed in the process of this research.

- What is the behaviour of females toward males?
- What does the novel’s take on the plight of women during the political conflict and violent situation in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule?
- What are the disparities in Mariam’s and Laila’s upbringing affect their perspectives on women’s roles in society?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research paper seeks to examine how the political upheaval in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule and Soviet invasion has affected the women and children at large turning them into victims of mental violence and physical torture. The research paper has portrayed its objectives through the two main female characters Laila and Mariam from two different perspectives based on their upbringing and family background.

The research objectives of the paper are as follows: -

- To analyse female difficulties in diverse regimes
- To understand Female awareness and identity
- To examine Afghanistan’s unique historical conditions, in the form of wars and conflicts, which have delivered excruciating encounters for its women for over a half-century.

ANALYSIS

At the start of the novel, Mariam displays a strong desire to attend she notifies his mentor and friend, the old Mullah Faizullah, who agrees. However, her mother, Nana, believes that schooling serves no use. She chastises Mariam for even considering education, “What is there

¹⁴⁶ Ahmed, R., A Thousand Splendid Suns: Rhetorical Vision of Afghan, 2012
¹⁴⁷ Joyia, 2013

to learn? What's the sense of schooling a girl like you?". Because the war is anchored in systems that are solely defined by males, the lengthy period of conflict and bloodshed in Afghanistan appears to have exacerbated gender discrimination and women's subjugation. Women's behaviour is viewed as a "cultural marker" of "their" societies since gender is fundamental to the development of regional, ethnic, and religious identities. Following the fall of the Soviets in Afghanistan, Jihadi commanders, and later the Taliban, created identities that were strongly masculinized and subjected women to horrific maltreatment. The Taliban, in especially, emphasized patriarchy as a distinguishing characteristic of national culture. They imposed strict female propriety norms. As a result, an assault was tried against women who were breaking the ideal of feminine modesty. Because the Taliban carried out these measures on an administrative level, a climate of brutality and humiliation against women pervaded society.

Gender Roles: Because of the invading armies and the restrictions that accompany them, gender interactions shift throughout the narrative. A communist government, for example, allows girls to attend school and work outside the home. Babi respects Laila's position and encourages her to make the most of it. Similarly, females are forbidden from spending too much time with persons of the opposite sex before marriage. Certain traditional or regional customs can also impact gender relations; for instance, Mariam is required to wear a veil for her husband before it becomes law. Men, like Laila's siblings, go to fight, while women remain at home and are frequently affected by the aftermaths of war.

With the arrival of the "Mujahideen" and, subsequently, the Taliban, communism's comparably progressive gender norms deteriorated radically. For Laila, the restrictions have the effect of separating her from Kabul, which she has always regarded as her home, and curtailing her ability to express herself and move. Nonetheless, the heroines find ways to

defy the rules: Laila flees to the orphanage outside of town, and she and Mariam arrange an escape (which is eventually unsuccessful) from Rasheed. The Taliban may have legally justified Rasheed's brutal beatings, but Hosseini supports more women's freedoms, and the reader is expected to sympathize with Laila and Mariam as they resist these injustices.

Suffering and Perseverance: None of the characters in the narrative are outsiders to physical or psychological misery and suffering. This grief, however, presents itself in a variety of ways. The loss of a dear one generates its type of deep sadness, often in an apparent absence of atonement. On the other hand, various types of agony are deliberately borne by the protagonists for the benefit of others.

The storyline of the novel appears to be struggling with how to build a hierarchy of sorrow and hardship: is the loss of Laila's brothers, since Babi (or so Mammy blames him for allowing them to battle the Mujahideen) caused them to pursue the Mujahideen, anyway worse than the stray rocket that killed Laila's companion "Giti". The characters deal with such pain in various ways. Following the loss of her sons, Mammy seeks sanctuary in her gloomy bedroom and never appears to be capable of escaping her grief. Laila, on the other hand, is more reasonable: she marries Rasheed not despite, but because of the loss of her parents, which she regards as her only alternative. Laila, in contrast, hand, is much more sensible: she marries Rasheed due to the tragic death of her parents, which she sees as her only option.

This is particularly true when the protagonists choose to freely suffer. Of course, Mariam chooses to kill Rasheed to provide a better life for Laila, despite the knowledge that she would be convicted and executed by the Taliban as a result. Women, in especially, are portrayed as excellent at suffering for the benefit of others. Women suffer their anguish and even participate in it, from Laila's horrifyingly terrible childbirth to Mariam's sacrifice.

Shame and Reputation: One sort of pain is related to shame in the novel, which emerges frequently as both a sadness to be endured and a force to inflict on others. In the first case, shame is associated with accountability and consequent remorse for a previous occurrence. Mariam's mother's death after Mariam escapes to Jalil is one example of such disgrace. Laila feels embarrassed that she survived the explosion that killed her parents solely by accident.

Another form of shame is inextricably linked to social standing and reputation, and it can cause severe psychological injury. Mariam is humiliated as a "harami" (bastard) by her paternal family, the people of Hamlet, and her husband Rasheed. Therefore, she feels she does not deserve to be appreciated and she will never locate a place where she belongs. Rasheed used both physical and psychological violence by striking both Mariam and Laila, inflicting pain on them while also degrading them and asserting his power over them.

Consequently, we can see how humiliation is extremely personal as well as immensely political. Most of the Taliban's regulations, particularly those involving women's rights, regard women as nasty (but very strong) creatures who must be kept hidden from public view. These prohibitions are frequently phrased in terms of "protecting" a woman's "honour," with honour serving as the novel's equivalent to shame.

Based on an assessment of Khaled Hosseini's "A Thousand Splendid Suns," one might conclude that Afghanistan's ongoing conflict has harmed its women by deepening patriarchal tyranny. As a result, they endured unspeakable anguish and suffering, which, in Hosseini's words, "has been matched by very few populations in recent human history." Their absence of a voice showed their anguish and pain. Hosseini's story strives to give women a voice and power by highlighting their plight.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Although the examination of the sample of book reviews found that the novel's fantasy elements were widely spread among users, the researcher does not suggest that "A Thousand Splendid Suns" is accountable for the readers' perceptions of Afghan culture. It is worth noting that the user's experiences with the book may have been influenced by their encounter with the mediated view of Afghan women, or their responses may have been culturally and geographically based. In other words, before reading the novel, the readers may have had certain views about Afghan women based on media, and their understanding of the book may have been influenced by their prior knowledge of Afghan society. Furthermore, the sample of book evaluations used for this research cannot be considered indicative of all Western eyes. Another disadvantage of the present study is that only English-speaking book evaluations were chosen. However, because of the researcher's poor language skills, the language of the evaluations was regarded as one of the factors for picking the book reviews. Furthermore, as one of the empirical constraints of online self-representation, the legitimacy of the website users' depiction could not be confirmed. Overall, the constraints of choosing book evaluations for this study were numerous. However, addressing these constraints is outside the scope of this study because the thesis's primary focus is on the novel's analysis. As previously noted, reading book reviews is a helpful step in reducing the researcher's bias and meeting the needs of the imaginative subject evaluation as the applied technique, to establish how the vision is carried out among readers. Future research would overcome these constraints while focusing more on readers' reactions to "A Thousand Splendid Suns".

Similarly, this study was carried out by a single researcher who had her cultural activities and background. Although integrating book reviews served to lessen the researcher's bias, her cultural prejudice may have been applied to the

study in some way. Furthermore, to offer a foundation for its research, this study explored a limited body of literature on Afghan women's depictions in Western mainstream media and women's engagement in Afghanistan's political and social environment. However, the current study's time and space constraints may excuse the lack of a comprehensive examination of these two areas. Furthermore, while selecting 180 book reviews allowed the researcher to incorporate the viewpoints of a greater number of people and gave a list of the most striking themes, it did not produce fuller assertions of the argumentative visions.

CONCLUSION

In his novel, Khaled Hosseini examines the situation of Afghanistan and women in general compassionately and sensitively. Both Mariam and Laila had relied on each other to live and thrive throughout the novel. They could not have progressed as far as they did without one another. Mariam has died, and Laila has gone on with her life after eventually fulfilling her aim. Tariq had provided her with the peace and contentment she had always sought. Hosseini adds a scenario in which Laila is attempting to name her future kid. "If it's a girl, Laila has already given her a name." If Laila had a girl, she had already decided to call her daughter Mariam. In my opinion, this sequence encapsulates the whole lesson that the writer was intending to express. With a little optimism, anybody can overcome any situation. This is what happened to Laila with Mariam's assistance. Laila opted to honour her mother by naming her kid after the woman who, in effect, saved her life. The story of Afghanistan in "A Thousand Splendid Suns" includes a description of women's roles and places in Afghan society.

To summarise, this research paper in hand highlights the flaws of the system created by men and includes information regarding male attitudes in Afghanistan. Females are regarded as the lowest-ranking animals. They are isolated from society and kept with the animals. The study collects data on Afghanistan's

cultural background as well as the aroused spirit among females battling and rebelling against the centre. Males, according to the researcher, would change their opinions and embrace girls as equals. He exhibited the sisterhood of Laila and Mariam. This study also attempted to emphasize the issues that women face because of patriarchy. It also aids us in fully comprehending Islamic Feminism, as well as what unfolded then and what is happening presently about the Taliban. It is clear from the examples offered that, despite constraints on females in Islamic nations, there have been women who have battled for their individuality and left their imprint in society.

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