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## WOMEN AND TRAUMA OF IMPRISONMENT: A STUDY OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

NEERAJ<sup>1\*</sup>, Prof. J. K. SHARMA<sup>2</sup>, Dr. MANJU DEVI<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, Baba Mastnath University, Rohtak

\*Email: [neerajvatsgk@gmail.com](mailto:neerajvatsgk@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, Baba Mastnath University, Rohtak.

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Gaur Brahman Degree College, Rohtak

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### Abstract

A literary and historical prism can be used to examine the prolonged history of relationships between women and violence in their homes. In the past, women lacked the bravery to speak out against violence in marriages, but with time, this idea has changed, and their struggles and tragedies are now being documented in literature. Native Americans had never lived in peace in Afghanistan, and brutality against women persisted during this time. The predicament faced by Afghan women is summed up in an old proverb that says, "A woman is best either in the house or in the grave." In his 2007 book *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini explored women's lives in Afghanistan via the story of Laila, the central character. It is regarded by Hosseini as a mother-daughter tale. The most painful experiences of Afghan women are depicted in the work. To focus on the perilous life that Afghan women lead, Hosseini has presented two female leads. This essay examines Hosseini's depiction of Afghan women's enslavement. The novel's feminist perspective will be used to examine the various degrees of marital violence in more detail.

**Keywords:** Oppression, Patriarchy, Taliban, Violence, War.

Numerous academics worldwide disparagingly discuss gender inequity and violence against women. One of the most important issues that many people worldwide must address is domestic abuse. According to A. L. Ganley estimates that domestic abuse frequently results in "death, injury, and sometimes even the victim chooses to commit suicide and mental health problems," (Ganley, 26). Abuse of this kind usually involves intrusions on the physical, sexual, and psychological levels. For example, domestic abuse "has a negative

impact in several aspects, such as quality of life, social and physical health" (Palwasha, 2) in Afghanistan, a country that holds the belief that "women are best either in the house or in the grave." In Afghanistan, husbands or mothers-in-law are typically the ones who carry out acts of violence. Afghanistan is a patriarchal society, with men lining every position in every organization. The majority of patriarchal men think that a guy should be the dominant, haughty, and powerful one, to the point that harassing women is not considered

inappropriate behaviour. Many Afghan women experience unfairness as a result of this behaviour toward them.

According to D. A. L. Roshan, Afghanistan is on the verge of becoming a country "that wants to give special attention to women" (Roshan, 6). The goals of Afghan women are not yet recognized, nevertheless, since they currently have to make a living while being subjugated, under pressure, and living under fate. Many different ethnic groups and regions engaged in a power struggle when the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan. Afghanistan's war took a long time to end, and it caused Afghan women's self-esteem to decline. Women were also appropriate targets for tyranny in the year that the Taliban swept to power, confusing their "freedom and security and were treated unfairly" (Roshan, 1). Afghanistan is described as a country full of trembling history and pointing to its culture in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The Soviet invasion and Taliban rule turned the Afghan people's quality of living into a terrifying and exhilarating anarchy, drastically altering the lives of the Afghan people.

The poignant novel is set in patriarchal Afghanistan and brings to light the most horrific experiences that women in that nation have had. The author has used two female protagonists to highlight the Afghan women's unjustifiable survival. The two primary female heroines in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Meriam and Laila, are shown battling domestic abuse in their bigamous marriage to Rasheed. Another character in the book *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is Nana, who is enduring her husband Jalil's criticism of her for being his wife. She gives up her independence in her family and society and is constantly psychologically altered. Even if Jalil isn't verbally or physically abusing her, there are deeper psychological shocks he causes her. Mariam is informed by Nana that Jalil lacks the courage to defend Nana's honor in front of his people. Jalil forces her to live on her own in Kolba after driving her out of his home rather than preserving her reputation. Beyond her words, Nana's mental anguish is evident as she mistreats Jalil in front of Mariam and continuously yells "harami." "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," (Hosseini, 7) Nana advises Mariam about this repulsive experience.

The common forms of bare violence against women include beatings, pinching, slapping, stabbings, thrusting, fisting, overheating from hot water applied to the body, shackling, and striking with a rock or stick. The vicious Rasheed in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* occupies a leather belt in his hand to beat Mariam even as "Mariam slides out of her bed and begins backpedaling. Her both arms instinctively crossed over her chest, where he usually strikes her first" (Hosseini, 255). For several years, Mariam has been suffering from severe psychological distress due to the fear that emerged from Rasheed's disposition. Hosseini uses Laila's expression to convey Rasheed's ferocity: "And then he is on Laila, pummeling her chest, her head, her belly with fists, tearing at her hair, throwing her to the wall... Rasheed pushes Laila to the ground and begins kicking her" (Hosseini, 326). Apart from that, both women must deal with double brutality—first from Rasheed and then from the Taliban. In addition, the young ladies must confront sexual aggression, when the controlling spouses are seen attempting to establish sex by coercing, injuring genital organs, and engaging in humiliating and abusive sexual interactions.

An oppressed person may be subjected to abuse, separation, dishonor, humiliation, and disgrace in front of his family and associates through vocal violence. Another form of animosity directed towards women is isolation. Hosseini writes that Rasheed changed following the altercation in the bathhouse. As stated in the description, "He eats, smokes, goes to bed, and sometimes comes back in the middle of the night for a brief and, of late, quite rough session of coupling," (Hosseini, 100) it is evident that most evenings when he gets home, he seldom speaks anymore. Even so, he rushes out of the house without saying hello to Mariam before heading out, saying, "He isn't so ready with a laugh on these outings anymore" (Hosseini, 100). In response to Mariam's questioning, "Are you angry with me?" (Hosseini, 100), in response, he occasionally lets out habitual sighs and engages in unbearable behaviors that psychologically irritate Mariam. When he finds a mistake in her cooking and

"complains about clutter around the yard or points out even minor uncleanliness in the house,"(Hosseini, 100) that is another instance of verbal abuse that is viewed. This is how the verbal and physical intensity are combined in the stone-chewing stage.

The key objective of a man-woman relationship is procreation. One section shows pride, while the other highlights the strength of the masculine. Here, childbirth involves more than just giving birth; the birth of a boy is especially significant. This is understandable in light of Rasheed's preference for Zalmai over Aziza. Rasheed's constant suffering is intensified by Aziza's birth. He never stops criticizing Aziza's actions. Look! Once upon a time, says Mariam. "Look! She's reaching for the rattle. How clever she is" (Hosseini, 253). Rasheed responds to this by saying, "I'll call the newspaper" (Hosseini, 253). Because of his unrealistic expectations that a boy would be unfaithful to him, Rasheed ends up being even more enraged with Mariam and Laila. After careful consideration, he suggests calling the baby boy who is expected to be born Zalmai. Strangely enough, this name refers to Tariq and Laila's son who is not legal. Rasheed continues to have the same expectations with Laila when she becomes pregnant. When Rasheed encounters Laila at his shoemaker's shop, he feels her tummy beneath the shirt rather than through it. Sensing the quick swelling, he says, "It's going to be a big boy. My son will be a Pahlwan!" (Hosseini, 247).

When one of the two protagonists speaks passionately about what it means "to be a woman in this world," where "like a compass needle, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman," the opening pages of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* alluded to the mistreatment of women in fundamentalist Islamic societies (Hosseini, 6-7). The Taliban, a radical mercenary group, took control of Afghanistan in two different cities: Herat in 1994 and Kabul, the country's capital, on September 27, 1999. They then cruelly plunged the country into an authoritarian despotism and gender apartheid state, depriving women and girls of their most basic human rights. Upon capturing power, the Taliban rule inaugurated a system of gender apartheid efficiently pushing the

women of Afghanistan into a status of virtual house capture. Under the Taliban administration, women were denied of basic rights. When they seized control in 1996, the Taliban primarily foisted strict proclamations. They expelled women from the labour force and bolted schools for girls and women and banished women from universities. Taliban forbade women from send-off their homes unless escorted by a close male family member. This excerpt highlights the mistreatment of women under Taliban governance. "One day, a young Taliban beat Laila with a radio antenna. When he was finished, he gave a final whack to the back of her neck and said I see you again I'll beat you until your mother's milk leaks out of your bones." (Hosseini, 313)

Taliban forced women to wear the burqa or chadari, which completely covers the body with only a tiny opening covered in net, and ordered that the windows of their homes be painted and undercoated in black. The Taliban forbade male physicians from considering women and girls and prevented female doctors and nurses from practicing. Women were denied even medical care for their illnesses in an effort to control everything. These regulations prevent Afghan women from seeing male doctors or from receiving medication from female doctors. On the other hand, the women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have very dissimilar educational familiarities. Mariam is educated by Mullah Faizullah in the Koran, and she acquires how to read and write. Yet when she enquires her mother about moving to school, Nana asserts that the only lecture that Mariam needs to learn is to 'endure', she utters, "Mariam, Women like us, we endure (Nana said) Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter; like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always find women. Always. You remember that, Mariam" (Hosseini, 7). Nana's disturbing expressions bring to light the distress of Afghan women who are predestined to tolerate whatever men impose on them.

Mariam, a first-generation lady, learned about life via hardship. She began to realize that knowing oneself and the other people in the world was the importance of education. She so gladly made an effort to impart her knowledge to Aziza, a

third-generation girl, through her experiences. By this point, Mariam had begun teaching Aziza passages from the Holy Koran, and Aziza was already familiar with the four ruqats of morning prayer. She could also recite the surah of ikhlas and the surah of fatiha with compassion. Mariam spoke to Laila "It's all I have to give her, ..., this knowledge, these prayers. They are the only true possession I've ever had." (Hosseini, 290). However, some fathers are also cunning and callous to their daughters. Mariam is abandoned by Jalil, an insensitive father. Inadvertently, she enjoys her father's affectionate remarks, such as "my princess," and she admires him. She lives in an idealized world without any connection to reality, even though her mother struggled with being a woman and a woman without recognition for having an illegitimate kid.

Laila's father, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of education and says that Laila needs an education just like any other male. He continues to tutor Laila himself because he believes that the status of women in Kabul is not what it should be. He examines the value of women supporting higher education. Laila's father told her that although she is still young, he wants her to understand this right away and that "Marriage can wait, education cannot. You're a very, very bright girl. Truly, you are. You can be anything you want, Laila." (Hosseini, 114). Her father knew that after this conflict ended, the country would need her just as much, if not more, than its soldiers. He said it is indispensable since "society has no chance of success if its own women are uneducated, Laila. No chance." (Hosseini, 114).

During times of conflict, women suffered and were frequently attacked. Numerous women were slaughtered and gang-raped by Taliban military personnel. Mariam learned of the men who, in the name of honour, killed their wives and daughters if the militia had infuriated them, as well as the women who were ending their own lives out of dread of being sexually assaulted. In Afghan society, child marriage is considered a traditional kind of malice. Mariam reveals, "My mother was fourteen when she had me. Thirteen when she married" (Hosseini, 208). In Afghanistan, polygamy and adultery are highly common. Mariam hears

Rasheed yell, "Don't be so dramatic. It's a common thing and you know it. I have many friends who have two, three, or four wives. Your own father had three. Likewise, what I'm doing now most men I know have done long ago. You know it's true" (Hosseini, 209). It is expected of women to be so submissive to their partners. It is considered that they are aware of their husbands' preferences and act appropriately. Mariam tells Laila what Rasheed likes, "Put them (washed and dried clothes) in the almari, not the closet. He likes the whites in the top drawer, the leftovers in the middle, with the socks" (Hosseini, 220).

According to the investigation, Mariam and Laila experienced numerous acts of violence. Mariam experienced violence in the forms of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. Mariam experienced shoving, kicking, and hitting as physical abuse. She has been subjected to psychological abuse in the interim, including insults, abuse, comparisons to Laila, and historical discussion. When Rasheed feels the need for sex, he resorts to intimidation, which is sexual assault. In addition, Laila experiences a great deal of physical abuse in the form of punches, kicks, and pulling, just like Mariam. Laila also experienced psychological harassment in the form of threats of death and physical torture. Furthermore, the male character's belief that he is above the law and has complete authority over his wife justifies his use of violence against them, which leads to the violence that befalls the two main female characters. The kind of patience with which Mariam expresses herself in their lives is sufficient to put Rasheed to death. Mariam has gained psychological independence since she still needs to be found and held responsible for her jail experiences. She also views psychological independence as the most important thing in the world. Since the beginning of the narration, Laila has never acknowledged Rasheed's statements. Mariam and Laila's self-preservation struggles were no longer pointless. Mariam and Laila had achieved the independence they had dreamed of, even though they were unable to come together in a single location.

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