



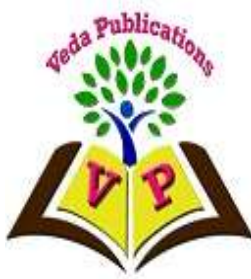
DEPICTION OF REPRESSION AGAINST WOMEN ILLUMINATED IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

Ms.A.Mahara Devi

(Assistant Professor, Department of English, E.M.G.Yadava Women's College, Madurai.)

doi.org/10.33329.joell.8.2.21.56

ABSTRACT



The Present article is an attempt to explore the agony of women and also their quest for identity. Through this novel, Hosseini tries to give voice for the voiceless women in Afghanistan. And Hosseini, most importantly focusses on the injustice done towards women in the Afghan society. The novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reveals a lot of female characters and describes how they are exploited by male. It mainly deals with two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila. Cultural imperialism is another thing which tortures women throughout their life. Gender equality is the prominent issue which was faced by these two characters. Not only Mariam and Laila, but also the women in Afghanistan experienced the gender issues and oppression made by male in Afghanistan. The novel, *Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini reveals the story of Afghanistan and also the position and place of women in the Afghan society. Very sensitively, Hosseini examined the pathetic condition and situation of women in Afghanistan in this novel. The novel is considered as a stepping stone to bring some changes in the life of Afghan women.

Keywords: *Oppression, Patriarchal Society, Cultural Imperialism, Suppression.*



Khaled Hosseini is a famous contemporary writer and he was known for his vivid depictions of Afghanistan in his novels. His notable works are *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. His Second Novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is about the story of two women, Mariam and Laila and how they lead their lives in Afghanistan around forty years. The novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reveals a lot of female characters and describes how they are exploited by male. The novel revolves around the Afghanistan's history. It mainly focuses on the two Afghan women Mariam and Laila.

By portraying these two characters, the brutality over women is shown. Gender equality is the major issue which was faced by these two characters. Not only Mariam and Laila, but also the women in Afghanistan experienced the gender issues and oppression made by male in Afghanistan. Because of the forces of Soviet military, during the Afghanistan war people highly suffered. After the war, the condition of women became very terrible in Afghanistan. They were suffered under the issues like, loss of identity, forced marriage, physical torture as well as mental torture given by their own male partner. Afghan women were not allowed to do anything without the acknowledgement of their husbands. Rosemarie Skaine comments 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).

Through this novel, Hosseini tries to give voice for the voiceless women in Afghanistan. And he most importantly focusses on the injustice done towards women in the Afghan society. So, the novel is considered as a stepping stone to bring some changes in the life of Afghan women. It highlights the women oppression clearly through the female characters. They were oppressed by the name of marginalization, violence, exploitation, powerlessness and cultural imperialism. Mariam is the protagonist in the novel.

In the beginning of the novel itself, she was addressed as 'harami'. During her childhood days, she was not aware of that word. But after getting maturity, the word started to hurt her completely. Mariam brought up her mother single handedly and her father Jalil, used to visit her occasionally. Jalili was in the condition, not to accept Mariam as her legal daughter. From this it is understood that Mariam is an illegal daughter to Jalil. Only because of this reason Mariam's mother Nana always scolds Mariam with hard words. Nana insists her daughter that she should never be like her mother. Mariam loves her father very much and she has a faith on her father. But Nana thoroughly hates Mariam's father for leaving them alone. Nana advises Mariam that,

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 (7).

Then the pathetic events started to occur in the life of Mariam at the age of 15. She forced to



marry Rasheed, who is very ugly and bad person. Mariam's husband always uses abusive words on her. In the beginning of her marriage life, she has done everything for her husband without expecting anything from him. But soon Rasheed started to torture Mariam and put restrictions for each and every actions of Mariam. Rasheed destroys the life of Mariam badly. Even sometimes, Rasheed uses the innocence of Mariam to blame her household works like cooking, cleaning and washing. At once Mariam served food for him and first, he chewed and spit it out. Mariam asked Rasheed for the reason. Then the conversation between Mariam and Rasheed was going on like this,

What's the matter? He mewled, mimicking her. What's the matter is that you've done it again. But I boiled it five minutes more than usual. That's a bold lie

I swear.....

Rasheed's cruelty is shown in an extreme level. He treats Mariam as a slave and an object like machine. He expects her to cook, to clean the house and wash the clothes for him. He just wants to get benefit from the works of Mariam. She is also marginalized because of her birth status. She is not accepted by her father as his daughter. Next to expel her from Jalili's family, she was married to Rasheed. Rasheed often tortures Mariam for not bearing son to him. Throughout her life, in many ways, she is marginalized by her own husband and the society.

The main problem which the Afghan women are facing is powerlessness. Women are not accepted to do anything individually and they don't have the

freedom to come out from their home. In their home, even their husband did not give respect to them. Unfortunately, for seven times Mariam got aborted and this makes Rasheed angry. He could not tolerate that Mariam won't bear son for him. So, Mariam does not have that much courage to speak against Rasheed, because still she is powerless. Nekki Kiddle states that, "Women are supposed to be as holders of men's honor names; thus, they stay inside the domestic sphere and are supposed to be silent and voiceless" (Kiddle, 39).

Another pathetic figure in the novel is Laila. Mariam and Laila have both similarities and dissimilarities. Mariam is not supposed to get education, because of her family situation. On the other side, Laila has the whole freedom, because her parents were very liberal and allowed her to get education. So what are all the freedom that Laila has enjoyed during her childhood days, is totally restricted to Mariam's life. Laila is an educated girl and she is quite confident in all her decisions taken by her.

Afterwards, in Laila's life the heart break turning point occurs. During the war period, Laila loses her parents, even her home and stands alone. In that situation, Laila was forced to agree to marry Rasheed and became the second wife of Rasheed. At that time Laila did not have any other option, because of her unexpected pregnancy. Soon Mariam and Laila became good friends and connected emotionally. Laila's boy friend is Tariq and once he tells Laila that he and his family decides to move to Pakistan. But at that time, Laila hesitates to leave her father, because of the love and affection which she has on her father.



When Laila's family decides to leave Afghanistan, the tragic events happened in the life of Laila.

Like Mariam, Laila also highly exploited by Rasheed both physically and psychologically. Laila has the best concern for Mariam. At once Rasheed beats Mariam and Lila tries to protect Mariam from Rasheed. Then an astonishing thing happened during that time.

The girl lunged at him. She grabbed his arm with both hands and tried to drag him down, but she could do no more than dangle from it. She did succeed it showing Rasheed's progress towards Mariam...

You win. You win. Don't do this. Please, Rasheed, no beating! Please don't do this (235).

This makes Mariam to feel that there is Laila who stood for her as a support. The feeling of Sisterhood created among Laila and Mariam. Then, Laila gave birth to a boy baby, named Zalmai. Rasheed's brutal behaviour is in peek, when Mariam and Laila decide to run away along with Aziza. After that he tortures both Mariam and Laila brutally and cruelly and locking them in different rooms. He did not even give any food or water for many days. Powerlessness is highly shown in the life of Mariam and Laila, because they do not have the courage to unlock the door. In each and every action, Rasheed proves them that they can not do anything against him.

Cultural imperialism is another thing which tortures women throughout their life. Because of the patriarchal society, women are highly suffered in the

hands of their husband and father. So, Mariam and Laila want to set free themselves from the brutal activities of Rasheed. When they went out from their home, in a half a way they caught by the police. The police officer did not give ears to their words. They did not bother about anything and think that this is their responsibility to handover them to their family, instead of bothering about their husband's ill-treatment.

Another pathetic condition of women is getting treatment in the hospital. Because, according to Taliban, in hospital's men are more important than women. So, the best treatment will be given to men only. When Laila is admitted in a hospital for delivery of her second baby, there won't be any proper facility. In the society, many men have misconception regarding the term, 'Patriarchy'. In the Patriarchal system, male should protect every woman instead of using their powers to make women as an inferior creature or object.

Violence is one of the most significant part in this novel. In the hands of Rasheed, both Mariam and Laila are suppressed and exploited by violence. Physical violence is the major concept in the life of Mariam. Rasheed always used to blame Mariam and especially her cooking. At once, Rasheed keep on pushing pebbles into Mariam's mouth and ask her to chew the pebbles. Her eyes were full of tears with pain and she struggled a lot. Words can not express the sufferings of Mariam. Soon it is understood that something is cracked in the back of her mouth.

"Good," Rasheed said. His cheeks were quivering. "Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you



know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food, and nothing else".

Then he was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars (103)

From this incident it is known that how Rasheed is aggressive towards his own wife. This type of violence finally may cause death. Because it is the most harmful and dangerous one. So, both Mariam and Laila are the victims in the hands of the society.

Finally, both the women learn to fight against oppression. They were trying to overcome the problems which were created by Rasheed. And that courage makes Mariam to kill Rasheed. Also, she is not in the mind to regret for the murder. The term, 'Women Oppression' could be highly portrayed in the novel, 'Thousand Splendid Suns' through the character, Mariam and Laila. Both of them tolerated a lot in their life with patience. The incidents which portrayed in the novel shows that how women have courage inside themselves.

Mariam's mother Nana is also a strong woman, because she brought her daughter with single handedly. In the beginning, Mariam could not understand the feelings of her mother. When she left her mother alone for her father, Nana get suicide and that creates a very big impact on Mariam's life. Because her mother always wants to protect her daughter and the mistake which commit by Nana is that she did not allow her daughter to get education. At once, Mullah Faizullah insists Nana that Mariam should get education and should learn the lesson of

life. But Nana rejected the words of Mullah and replied that,

"Learn? Learn what, Mullah Sahib?

Nana said Sharply.

"What is there to learn?" She snapped her eyes toward Mariam ...

"What's the sense schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon. And you'll learn nothing of value in those schools. There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school....

Only one skill. And it's this: tahamul Endure" (18)

There will be lot of meanings in the single term, 'Endure'. Here, Nana mentions that in Afghan society every woman should have the power to endure the ill-treatment of their male partner. So, the word is considered as an ointment for Mariam when she was harassed by her husband. A mother is an important part in every daughter's life. Because through the mother only a daughter can get moral support. But unfortunately, that did not happen in Mariam's life.

Here, the little girl Aziza, Laila's daughter represents the young women, who have the courage, confident and power of getting education. Soon, Rasheed decides to destroy Aziza's life also by sending her to orphanage. But when Aziza's real father Tariq get into her life, then everything changed. In many occasions, women will be the complete responsible for the depression of other women. Because, when Mariam is in her father's



house, Jalil's three wives try to send Mariam out. So they decided and planned the marriage between fifteen years old Mariam and forty five years old Rasheed. Through the novel, *Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini reveals the story of Afghanistan and also the position and place of women in the Afghan society. Very sensitively, Hosseini examined the pathetic condition and situation of women in Afghanistan in this novel.

WORKS CITED

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. London: Bloomsbury.2013.

Keddie, Nekki.R. *Women in the Middle East: A History*, Book one. Princeton University Press. 2006.

Skaine, Rosemarrie. *The Women of Afghanistan Under the Taliban*. North Carolina: Mc Farland & Company, Inc.2002.Web.
