

Gender Psychology in Khaled Hosseini's Novel 'A Thousand Splendid Suns'

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Abstract:

This research explores the gender psychology about the two women who were facing difficulty in their household and marriages. This novel gives a close observation of limited role of women in Afghan Society. The role of women in Afghanistan explores the depiction of the loss of voice of Afghan women during the Taliban regime. The Afghan women are confined in homes. This novel discovers the toxic masculinity in the society by comparing different characters. The Gender role is discussed and the violence were the women face in their households. This story portrays the hardships the women faced due their spouses as well as the policies that were ascribed by the government.

Keywords: Afghan women, patriarchy, psychological, oppression, pain, suffering, turmoil.

Khaled Hosseini's 'A thousand splendid suns' is a novel talks about the story about two young women, Laila and Mariam. Mariam is a poor, traditional and endurance women. She is a bitter woman who felt shame and sorrow being a 'harami' makes her unable to independent. She is the illegitimate daughter of Nana and Jalil, a rich theatre owner. He lives reportedly with is three legitimate wives and nine children.

Nana was not a legal wife to Jalil so he abandoned Nana during the time of pregnancy. She was forced to live in a secluded place. The little Mariam was very much anxious about her father and look forward about his frequent visits. She never trusted her mother's stories about Jalil's indifference and deceit. But Mariam often steals away from her mother to visit her father. Her sorrowful journey begins when she realizes that her father never allows her into his house. Very soon, Nana commits suicide when Mariam was fifteen. She was very much yearning for father's love as well as a good education. She lives with her stepsiblings. Her father gets pressured by his wives and the society, to get her married. Mariam is forced to marry the shoemaker, Rasheed who is almost fifteen years older than her.

The life with Rasheed does not bring her any happiness. He is strict, dominating, cruel and violent. But Mariam learns to adjust to his demands. The joys of Mariam are very short lived. She is shattered when she fails to bear a child, and day-by-day Rasheed's behavior undergoes a change.

“... no matter what she did to please him, no matter how thoroughly she submitted to his wants and demands, it wasn't enough. She could not give him his son back. In this most essential way, she had failed him his son back. In this most essential way, she had failed him. Seven times she had failed him-and how she was nothing but a burden to him.” (90)

Mariam's life is seen to be pre decided, when she gets into the marriage life, she complies to typical role of a women. In this story she is described as the making food, cleaning the house and serving her husband when he arrived from work. The gender roles as defined are “refers to the expectations that go along with being male versus female” (Helgeson). One of the critics, Ramet says that, “it is seen as the society understands of what is a proper behavior related to gender. Each society forms its own standards for gender linked behavior”

The culture of Afghanistan is defined through the man defines the role of his wife according to his own beliefs. In this novel 'Rasheed' played a role of toxic masculinity in which he not even allowing Mariam to interact with other women, and also asking her to cover from head to toe. On the other hand, he is seen to be possessing magazines with pictures of nude women. In the beginning of their marriage Mariam is seen to obliging to all the rules set up by her husband, it may be because there is a gender stereotype that men are the one that defines the role of women and they have needs. When Mariam is unable to have children, Rasheed loses his patience and he is conservative and willful. He instructs Mariam on what he believes an ideal wife should be, he says that wife must be subservient, obedient, and fertile. He loses patience with her and abuses her both physically and verbally.

After eighteen years later, Rasheed takes another wife, fourteen year-old Laila. She is smart and spirited girl. Mariam and Laila become allies in a battle with Rasheed, whose violent abuse is endorsed by custom and law. The gender inequality is also observed in this novel. We can observe that Rasheed only wants a son and he was waiting for Laila's first pregnancy. When it was known as girl, he gets angry and upset even the clothes he brought for Laila's daughter was of boys. His obsession with having a male child is observed in the story. When Laila gave birth to a son, Rasheed tries to bring expensive gifts for him, but for Aziza (Laila's daughter), he always annoyed at her.

In this novel many types of violence are described as physical violence and mental abuse. The violent acts which includes punching, hitting, beating, kicking, biting and stabbing. The husband usually does this physical violence to their wife. When the men uses abuse, it is the way of showing his power towards the spouse, and the motivation of abuse is the control and dominance towards the women. When once Laila, Mariam and Aziza tried to escape from Afghanistan, they were caught by the Taliban's Rasheed shows his anger towards them by locking them up in the rooms and didn't provide them food. He deprived them of their basic rights.

Laila and Mariam started helping each other and gave emotional support to each other. Mariam and Laila life with Rasheed proves to be a daily ordeal where both are subject

to his merciless beatings and bitter taunts. This sense of shared grief and pain leads to the development of a strong and intimate bond between, Mariam, Laila and her daughter, Aziza.

“Mariam’s eyes watered. Her heart took flight and she marveled at how, after all three years of rattling loose, she had found in this little creature the first true connection in her life of false, failed connection.” (226)

Finally they both try to seek escape from Rasheed’s cruelty and put an end to their suffering. So they planned to cross the border to Pakistan, but the attempted was failed. The officer caught them for illegal trying and they were sent back to Rasheed to bear more tortures. During this time, Taliban come to power. They were a guerilla force of young Pashtun men. They started taking cities from the existing government and they declare new rules and regulations. They were the real extremists who forbade women from working and from being sent to school. They had banned films, dancing and singing. For men like, Rasheed it did not make a difference. He had already imposed such strict laws on Mariam and Laila. Those wielding power, whether at home or in the country are always seen to have allied interests. When Rasheed’s shop burns and the family are almost starving, Laila is forced to send Aziza to an orphanage. The Director of the orphanage tells her.

Rasheed refuses to accompany Laila to meet Aziza, Laila has to bear punishment imposed by the Taliban for going out alone. As a result of the punishment she would return home beaten, bruised and bloodied.

However, there was a resurgence of hope when Tariq returns to Kabul from Pakistan. Tariq the lover of Laila and the father of Aziza, who returns to Kabul from Pakistan. Tariq’s frequently visits to Laila angers Rasheed. Zalmai the son of Rasheed and Lalia informs him about the visits to Rasheed and he forces himself upon Laila and tries to kill her. But Mariam saves her by hitting Rasheed on his head with a shovel. Mariam sacrifices her life to bring happiness to Laila, to enable her to live a life of dignity with Tariq. Mariam refuses to leave Kabul with Tariq, Laila and the children. She is jailed for her offense and she is sentenced to death. She bravely accepts the death because she was very happy that Laila and her children are in safe hands.

‘A Thousand Splendid Suns’ is a story deeply rooted in the culture and politics of Afghanistan. These issues discussed from the women’s point of view. It can be applied to several different households, who are under their control of their spouses. They bear the violence because they want to survive.

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