

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S NOVELA***THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*****Author: Mrs. G. Ramya Sri**

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the problems of Afghan women through the characters of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Khaled Hossini, a well-known American author of Afghan descent, who wrote this novel. The characters in his novels do the finest job of illuminating the place of women in Afghan culture. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, there are numerous instances where these ladies are forced to make judgements. Women are required to abide by rigid social norms that specify how they should behave around all men in the community. In Afghan society, a woman is expected to uphold moral principles and follow accepted social norms. In Afghan culture, a woman must support her husband's family and carry out the expectations of a wife. In Afghan society, cultural norms that portray women as less capable than their male counterparts determine a woman's place in society. Women must be managed and protected because they stand for the dignity of the family, community, and country, in order to preserve their moral purity. They aren't allowed to look up at or establish eye contact with men. They might never interact with males in person. Women should wear modest clothing that covers any exposed skin. It is forbidden to laugh aloud. Afghan women have historically been denied many of their legal rights and their lives have been restricted by the veil, despite the fact that Islam dictates that men and women be treated equally before the law.

Key Words: Afghan women, struggle, rules, identity, pathetic plight

Khaled Hosseini is a well-known American novelist and physician of Afghan origin. He worked as a doctor in California after graduating from college. He has three novels to his credit, the most recent of which was *The Kite Runner* in 2003. His three novels were in the list of best-sellers. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released in 2007 and was a Times Best Seller for 103 weeks, including 15 weeks at number one.

Afghan women were denied education, the right to work, the freedom to relocate, appropriate healthcare, and other rights under the Taliban administration. Women strove to attain independence and reform a society dominated by men under various governments such as the Mujahideen and the Taliban in the later part of the twentieth century. Afghanistan's authorities continually worked to reduce women's restrictions in the country throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout the twentieth century, Afghanistan remained a tribal country, with men wielding absolute power over women.

Three significant times in Afghan history have impacted the status of women in Afghanistan. When the Islamic State was created, it placed a ban on alcohol and the enforcement of a sometimes-purely symbolic veil for women. Women, on the other hand, have remained in the workforce, and the liberal elements of the 1964 constitution have been generally upheld. Women's rights became severely curtailed after Hekmatyar was appointed Afghan Prime Minister by the Islamic State in 1996. He asked that ladies on television be sacked.

The Taliban proclaimed immediately after taking control that women were not permitted to work and were not permitted to leave their houses unless accompanied by a male family member. When they did go out, they were compelled to wear an all-covering burqa. Women were denied formal education as a result of these prohibitions. Some ladies were unable to leave their homes because they could not buy a burqa or because they had no male relatives. Typically, women were obliged to stay at home and paint their windows so that no one could see in or out. Women in Afghanistan were virtually placed under house arrest under the Taliban's five-year rule. Some women who had held respected positions were compelled to walk the streets in burqas, selling everything they possessed or begging to survive.

Before the Taliban administration, the majority of teachers were women. The new restrictions on women's work resulted in a severe shortage of teachers. This put a tremendous

pressure on both boys' and girls' education. Although most employment for women were prohibited, including teaching, certain women in the medical industry were permitted to continue working. This is due to the Taliban's requirement that women only be treated by female physicians. Furthermore, it was difficult for women to seek medical attention for a variety of reasons. It was frowned upon for women to require hospitalisation, and those who attempted to do so were usually beaten. Even if a woman made it to a hospital, there was no guarantee that she would be seen by a doctor.

In Afghan society, a woman's role is controlled by societal conventions that portray women as less than their male counterparts. Without reason, women are regarded as untrustworthy. Women represent the honour of family, community, and nation, and they must be both managed and protected. So that they can keep their moral purity. It is forbidden to look at guys or make eye contact with them. They might never have direct touch with guys. A woman must dress well without exposing too much skin. It is not permitted to laugh aloud.

Attention women:

You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by amahram, a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home.

You will not, under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten.

Cosmetics are forbidden.

Jewelry is forbidden.

You will not wear charming clothes.

You will not speak unless spoken to.

You will not make eye contact with men.

You will not laugh in public. If you do, you will be beaten.

You will not paint your nails. If you do, you will lose a finger.

Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately.

Women are forbidden from working.

If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death

Listen. Listen well. Obey. Allah-u-akbar. (270-271)

Despite the fact that Islam requires men and women to be equal before the law, Afghan women have historically been denied many of their legal rights and their lives have been restricted behind the veil. Women were required to cover their full body in public by wearing a burqa. They are quite hot to wear and make it difficult to breathe. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini not only depicts the violence of Afghanistan across three decades, but it also documents the fate of women before and throughout the Taliban era.

In his masterpiece *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini showed the pitiful situation of Afghan women. Hosseini depicted the culture of Afghanistan brilliantly in this work. The author has done an excellent job of portraying the characters. He emphasises the stringent Islamic regulations followed by Afghan women, as well as the torture they undergo on a daily basis. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* chronicles the lives of two Afghan women born two decades apart whose lives are pulled together by a series of sad circumstances. It focuses on the challenges and tribulations of Afghan women. It has a long history.

A Thousand Splendid Sun explores the lives of Mariam and Laila, the two wives of the violent and chauvinist Rasheed. Mariam, the illegitimate daughter of an outcast mother, marries the middle-aged Rasheed at the age of fifteen, following her mother's suicide. Her father arranges her marriage when his high-ranking family requests that his disgrace be removed. After eighteen years and many miscarriages, Mariam becomes a frequent target of Rasheed's abuse. In this novel, the female characters repress all of their emotions. Mariam goes through a lot as Laila strives to raise her voice.

The story is about the weakness of powerful men and the inherent strength of frail women. It delves into the lives of two poor Afghan ladies from quite different backgrounds who

are compelled to share the same terrible family. It recounts their misfortunes, unflinching endurance, sacrifices, harshness, rejection by their relatives, and brutal husband. They are victims of domestic violence, but they find love, camaraderie, and solace in one another.

Mariam had never before worn a burqa. Rasheed had to help her put it on. The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange seeing the world through a mesh screen. She practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on the hem and stumbling. The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving, and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth. (65)

The burqas in Afghanistan are used to make women submissive to their husbands. Mariam quickly learns this from her husband, Rasheed, that he too will enforce this practice, saying, "But I'm a different breed of man, Mariam, Where I come from, one wrong look, one improper word, and blood is spilled. Where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only. I want you to remember that. Do you understand?"(63). Women must wear their burqas at all times, unless they are at home with their spouses, isolated and secluded from society. This thin covering of cloth that wraps their bodies and forces them to submit silences women.

Women in Afghanistan have substantially diverse educational experiences than men. They are not permitted to learn, and Mariam is no exception. Mullah Faizullah solely tutors her in the Koran, and she learns to read and write. When she inquires about attending school, her mother says that the only lesson she needs to learn is how to endure. Ultimately, Mariam's endurance is what helps her to withstand the horrific conditions and dismal personal losses throughout the rest of the tale.

Rasheed marries Laila without asking Mariam's approval. In Afghan society, norms are written in favour of men. They are free to marry as many times as they like and to divorce their wives if they fall out of favour. Mariam, like other women, is in a similar circumstance. Her psychological pain is exacerbated when she sees Laila living with Rasheed. She feels unwelcome at her husband's home, a feeling she shared with her father. But, at the same time, Mariam is grateful to her husband for not evicting her.

Rasheed's dreams are broken because Mariam was unable to bear him a child, and he often hits her. He criticises and tortures her for all she does for him. She not only tolerates it, but willingly accepts it because she is alone and always under his control. They've been married for four years, and it's been difficult to tolerate his derision, taunts, and striding by her as if she were nothing more than a house cat. She has, however, learned to tolerate his mood swings because she is terrified. "On occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks, and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not" (89).

Rasheed eats the rice one evening, chews it once, and promptly spits it out. He runs out of the home, shaking the rice fiercely from his fingers, pushing the plate away. He returns with a bunch of pebbles, forcing her mouth open and stuffing them in before instructing her to chew the pebbles. Mariam mumbles a plea through her mouthful of dirt and gravel. Tears stream from her worried eyes. She does so in dread, fracturing the molars in the back of her mouth. He tells her, "Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food and nothing else" (94). Then he goes away, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars.

When Laila's second pregnancy requires a hospital visit, she and Mariam are forced to travel throughout Kabul owing to a healthcare system shift that separates men and women into separate hospitals. The Rabia Balkhi hospital will now solely treat women, and they discover that there is nothing there. Only female staff members have been released from Kabul's hospitals, and there is no clean water, oxygen, medicines, or even electricity. The hospital waiting area is filled with female patients and their relatives. Mariam assists Laila in sitting against a wall, assuring her that she will be inspected by a doctor.

Mariam realises the sacrifices made by a mother while struggling through the crowd in the waiting area to reach the registration window. The nurse there informs them that there are only two doctors on staff and that they are both busy with procedures. They had to wait most of the day until they are called inside in the evening, when Laila is finally seen by a doctor, who is dressed in a heavy dark burqa. After extensively inspecting her, she informs Laila that she needs an emergent caesarian section because the baby is breech and they are late. However, no anaesthesia is available for the surgery.

Furthermore, the hospital lacks X-ray equipment, suction, and even basic antibiotics. The doctor also informs her that when non-governmental organisations (NGOs) offer money, it is turned down. Mariam tries to remember the name of the anaesthesia so she can acquire it for Laila. However, the doctor responds curtly that there is no time and that the medicine is not accessible at the time in local stores. She has to fight through traffic, and the time is 8:30 p.m. She could be detained for violating the curfew. Even if she finds the drug, she probably won't be able to pay it.

When Laila talked about the lack of anesthesia and that any further delay can harm the baby, Laila just asks the doctor, "Cut me open and give me my baby" (259). The doctor goes ahead with the procedure. Mariam explains this situation as, "Here was a woman who had understood that she was lucky even to be working, there was always something, something else, that they could take away" (260). This simple rule, as well as the fact that all of the doctor's burqas are grungy and old, shows how little women are valued in this society. They are treated like dirt, and the only solace that they wear and embrace whatever little freedom and comfort it gives them.

When the droughts strike, many women are forced to abandon their children and deposit them in orphanages because they cannot feed them. Because Rasheed is unable to feed them all, Laila is forced to give up her tiny baby, Aziza, and place her in an orphanage. Laila and Mariam promise to see her regularly once she is placed in the orphanage. Rasheed walks to the orphanage with Mariam, Laila, and Zalmi to visit Aziza for 15 minutes at the beginning of her stay. Rasheed occasionally starts walking and forces everyone to turn around since he does not want to walk. Rasheed then refuses to go at all.

Women are not permitted to walk down the street without the companionship of a man. If they are apprehended, they are thrashed and returned home. Laila sneaks out alone to visit the child because her husband refuses to accompany her. The Taliban frequently beat her for walking alone. Sometimes they just curse her and send her home; other times, they beat her until she gives up. She frequently meets with a variety of wooden clubs, fresh tree branches, short whips, slaps, and even fists.

Rasheed beats Laila and locks the children in the room one night. He shoves a gun into Laila's mouth, and Mariam tries but fails to move him. Mariam is suddenly overcome by a yearning she has been striving for her entire life. In order to save Laila, she runs to the back shed to get a shovel and uses it to murder her abusive husband of nearly thirty years.

In the narrative, both ladies suffer the same hardships and struggles that any woman in Afghan society does. Hosseini depicts the true concerns of Afghan society in this work. In Hosseini's works, struggle is a fundamental unifying element. The characters are thrust into circumstances that they did not create, prefer, or initiate. They fight till the bitter end, but they never surrender. Rape is one of the most serious issues confronting women in Afghanistan. An article published in Washington Post says, "One of the biggest problems at the camps is when the women go out to gather firewood to cook, and they get attacked and raped" (15).

Afghan women were unspoken and nameless until Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* broke the silence with the story of Mariam and Laila's troubled existence. Hosseini's story illustrates the tribulations and sufferings of Afghan women in a culture where law, custom, traditions, and religion have joined forces to shrink the circle of a free and independent life for women. Mariam and Laila, the novel's primary characters, have oppressed lives.

Khaled Hosseini describes in his novel is really unfortunate not for women only but for humanity at large. The Afghan women are battling for their right to exist as women. The canvas of Khaled Hosseini is wide and lovely. He stresses the need for their healthcare and education, as well as their mistreatment by their dads, husbands, neighbours, and, most importantly, the politics of Afghanistan's never-ending war. In this work, Hosseini addresses the suppression of women in Afghanistan, as well as other limits on education and familial subordination. He has built Afghanistan's man-dominated patriarchal Muslim environment, where women are denied equality and freedom.

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