



EXPLORING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S "THE THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS"

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Abstract. Khaled Hosseini is citizen of Afghanistan living in the United States considered to be one of the leading writers establishing himself as a great representative of literature by his noble works. In 2007, he wrote his second work named «A Thousand Splendid Suns», in which he tried to show the image of the reality of life along with the existence of love in injustice society by describing difficult situations and torture moments of women characters. This work reveals not only the horrors of war, but also importance of peace by the sequence of events occurred in the novel. In «A Thousand Splendid Suns», Mariam and Laila are the main female characters chosen by the author to represent the problem of marriage, relationship between males and females, the system of patriarchal society, sufferings of women living in Afghanistan and their tolerance that provide the significance of female characters. Common features of these characters are illustrated through their complex spiritual world as well as their responses to hardships, people surrounding them and public life. Analyzing and observing the women in this work help to build a near connection between these two characters allowing readers to form a deeper understanding of their personalities, behaviour and attitudes. To conclude, in the following article the role of females, themes which are shown through them are discussed to reveal author's purpose to highlight some unfairness in the community at that time.

Key words: Khaled Hosseini, Mariam, Laila, relationship, personality, marriage, spiritual world, feelings, symbolic - figurative imagery, patriarchal society.

Introduction. Bestselling Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini burst onto the literary scene with his 2003 debut "The Kite Runner" becoming an





authoritative voice on Afghanistan's modern history and culture overnight [1]. His second novel "A Thousand Splendid Suns" (2007) gained even more critical acclaim and commercial success [2]. Breaking from The Kite Runner's masculine perspective, Hosseini adopts a female-centric narrative in "A Thousand Splendid Suns" that accepted widely by global audiences. As one reviewer emphasized the importance of novel mentioning this statement: "reminds us just how bad life can be for women who lack power and status" [3].

Set against the image of Afghanistan's harsh political shifts from the 1960s to the early 2000s, "A Thousand Splendid Suns" depicts the turbulent lives and strict spirit of two women from vastly different backgrounds bound by a polygamous marriage. Mariam is an illegitimate child whose father was honorable businessman in Herat, while Laila is the daughter of an educated, progressive family in Kabul. Despite their differences, both women try to fight against and escape from the deeply patriarchal society that denies female autonomy at every turn. Their contrasting attitudes, choices, and fates reveal a spectrum of women's significance in Afghan society and culture. Beyond its emotional pull, Hosseini's novel offers profound sociological insights into gender relations in Afghanistan.

This article explores the significance of women in "A Thousand Splendid Suns" with a focus on how Hosseini develops complex female characters that symbolize varying dimensions of Afghan womanhood. Analysis of major characters like Mariam and Laila as well as minor ones like Aziza and Mammy shows the encoded meaning behind their contrasting traits and narrative journey. Examining the personalities of women in Hosseini's novel sheds light on little-known realities of Afghan women's lives while celebrating their resilience and courage in the face of cruel adversity.

Methods. As the geopolitical and cultural context of Afghanistan is crucial for understanding the experiences of the female characters in "The Thousand Splendid Suns", research began with an in-depth review of secondary literature covering the historical background of the novel. Key events covered include Afghanistan's political history from the 1970s onwards, looking at the various regimes in power and their treatment of women, as well as some analysis of the Afghan women's portrait in society and culture during this period.

The capacity of the analysis has used two theoretical aspects - feminism and postcolonialism. From a feminist perspective, concepts around women's movement, the effect of systematic gender discrimination, and gender roles were applied to critically examine Mariam and Laila's struggles and journey [2].





Postcolonial theory was also invaluable for understanding their status under Afghanistan's political government and exploration by foreign powers, and for analyzing terms like Orientalism, cultural hegemony and the importance of giving voice to the marginalized [3].

There are many relevant connections in Hosseini's other well-known novels like "The Kite Runner" (2003). As certain themes around gender and women are linked, it should be noted that far less critical analysis exists on "The Thousand Splendid Suns" compared to his first novel due its more recent publication.

Results and analysis. As numerous critics and scholars have highlighted the marked shift from a male-driven perspective in "The Kite Runner" to female protagonists in "A Thousand Splendid Suns" underscores Hosseini's commitment to revealing women's experiences in Afghanistan [4]. His emphasis on the domestic sphere as the primary setting reflects realities of Afghan life whereby women are confined to the home. Scenes of Mariam and Laila carrying out daily chores like cooking and cleaning as wives and later mothers dominate the novel and define its emotional landscape.

At the same time, Hosseini keeps returning to the theme of female education and how it shapes Afghan women's worldviews and sense of possibility. The contrast between Mariam's limited formal education and Laila's enrollment in school followed by her profession as a teacher in the orphanage is a central plotline that unfolds alongside political developments during Afghanistan's decades-long conflict. Their different educational backgrounds feed into Mariam's resigned acceptance of her fate as an first wife as opposed to Laila's persistent struggle to resist and overcome her abusive circumstances.

Of course, the fact that both women endure and survive Rasheed's oppression despite minimal control over their destinies reflects the disempowered status of Afghan women. Hosseini thus implies that personal resolve alone cannot overcome systemic bias against females no matter how strong-willed they are as individuals. The tragic ending of Mariam being executed for murdering Rasheed symbolizes the ultimate price women pay for daring to subvert traditional gender roles.

At the same time, Laila's escape and later return to Kabul to set up a school emphasizes that glimmers of progress depend on spreading education as a means of female liberation. Hosseini's hopeful yet pragmatic ending avoids simplistic notions that women can undo patriarchy singlehandedly but nonetheless upholds their efforts as essential for Afghanistan's renewal.





The central yet opposing experiences of Mariam and Laila establish them as dual protagonists that represent contrasting dimensions of womanhood within and outside conventional roles. Their differing personalities reflect the diverse circumstances and attitudes among Afghan women despite being bound by rigid patriarchal mores.

Mariam's tragic life as the despised daughter of a wealthy Herat businessman and socially ostracized as illegitimate epitomizes the outcast role that has plagued generations of Afghan women. Denied basic rights like inheritance by both family and society due to her birth out of wedlock, Mariam epitomizes the harsh judgment reserved for females who somehow 'transgress' – even if through no fault of their own. At every stage of her life from adolescence to middle age, Mariam suffers rejection and attempts to find refuge in conforming to prescribed gender roles like daughter, wife and mother.

In contrast, Laila's relative opportunities and support engender hopes of pursuing her education and following a professional career that diverges from the domestic path reserved for Afghan women. However, political upheavals shatter those hopes as conflict takes her parents and she reluctantly settles for marriage to Rasheed to survive war-torn Kabul. Forced to become a stepmother to Mariam's children and endure Rasheed's increasing violence, Laila nonetheless plots to run away with her daughter plus Mariam to build an independent life elsewhere. From attempting to continue schooling under repressive Taliban rule to fighting against Rasheed's daily abuses, Laila embodies defiance of gender limitations throughout her coming-of-age journey.

In developing these opposing yet complementary main characters, Hosseini encapsulates diverse facets of women pursuing fulfillment within and opposing harsh strictures in a contemporary Islamic society. Their contrasting choices and consequences highlight the limited options available to Afghan women while showcasing their perseverance and resistance. Together, Mariam and Laila represent a spectrum of female attitudes and experiences in the face of unrelenting oppression.

Beyond Mariam and Laila's central storylines, Hosseini also devotes attention to their relationships with respective maternal figures. Secondary characters like Mariam's mother Nana and Laila's mother Fariba illuminate a latent matriarchal tradition whereby Afghan women pass down knowledge and resilience to daughters as their sole legacy.

The elderly, embittered Nana serves as Mariam's only example of womanhood and she imparts harsh wisdom to the young girl while they live





isolated in a remote village. Rejecting Jalil's wealth and status, Nana preaches to Mariam about the hypocrisy of Afghan patriarchy and warns that women inevitably suffer exclusion and bias under its stringent mores. Her own miserable life serving Jalil's legitimate wives fuels Nana's distrust of marriage as a vehicle for female security.

Discussion. Beyond Mariam and Laila's heroism within private spheres, Hosseini includes several minor female characters that serve as public figures fighting oppressive systems despite little reward or recognition. Characters like Laila's teacher Khala Rangmaal and the female prison doctor display courage to implement their ideas of justice while knowing the personal risks involved. Their professional commitment symbolizes real-world Afghan feminists who led the limited advances toward women's rights in recent decades.

The leftist schoolteacher Khala Rangmaal imparts not just academic lessons but early lessons about gender equality to impressionable students like Laila. Her progressive views and refusal to cover set her apart from traditional attitudes among Afghan women no matter that she frames them as preparations for nation building rather than female liberation. Openly dismissing gender hierarchy as a Soviet myth imposed to undermine national stability, Khala Rangmaal is revealed as an idealist with limited ability to shield young girls from ensuing mayhem that disproportionately endangers females. However, her valiant example provides Laila's first glimpse of a defiant woman flouting restrictions on public roles, leaving a latent seed that matures over traumatic intervening years of displacement and widowhood.

Similarly, the prison doctor who examines Mariam prior to her execution for murder gently probes whether she acted in self-defense, implying that state-sanctioned violence perpetuates rather than resolves injustice. Her official yet humane approach hints at an ethos opposed to Taliban extremism even though she operates under their regime. As the only female professional to show empathy for Mariam's fate as a legally victimized wife, the doctor's cameo speaks for Afghan feminists throughout the 20th century who critiqued systemic misogyny while endeavoring to improve material realities within unavoidable constraints.

Conclusion. In multiple ways both overt and understated, Hosseini's all-encompassing second novel spotlights Afghan women as pillars of the national ethos whose passions fuel larger cycles of death and rebirth. Beyond individual fates befalling Mariam and Laila that fictionalize countless lived realities under Taliban rule, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* positions female protagonists as





embodiments of the land's wounded yet resilient essence. Their contrasting choices and legacies offer a spectrum of womanhood that spans conventional resignation, overt resistance, and understated action against bias and brutality from fathers and husbands as 'ordinary situation' in the state. Afghanistan's surviving population of widows and orphans mirror loss and displacement haunting the agitated country often dubbed 'the graveyard of empires' that refuses to be subdued by foreign or domestic powers. By encoding meanings within and beyond singular personal stories into sweeping feminist tapestries, Hosseini's artful narrative secures Afghan women's significance center stage where they rightfully belong.

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