

PATRIARCH SOCIETY AND STRUGGLE OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS BY KHALID HOSSEINI

Mr. Yaseen Pyar Ali ¹

Abstract

This paper evaluates the position of women in a patriarch society as depicted by Khalid Hosseini in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007). The paper unfolds various stereotypes of a patriarchal society and social constructionism as means of exploitation, discrimination, extermination, suppression, oppression, marginalization, dislocation and sabotage of female characters in the novel. The paper applies Textual Analysis Method and Close Reading Method to evaluate the selected work from feminist perspective. The paper studies the female characters, Mariam and Laila, in context with the social, political, biological and religious discrimination faced in a patriarch society of Afghanistan. Furthermore, this study aims to analyze the biological differences cherished in a patriarch society making women powerless, subaltern, undermined, irrational, emotional and innate inferior; while men projected as powerful, dominant, privileged, rational, sensible, and innate superior in context with the selected work. The psychological oppression as a result of atrocities on women in patriarch society of Afghanistan would be highlighted through the female characters in the novel. The paper also exposes the significant position of female characters and their struggle and endeavor against the patriarchal society. The paper would be a meaningful

¹ M.Phil Research Scholar, The Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

study of female characters' struggle for freedom and equality as a firm stand against patriarch society and gender discrimination as depicted in the selected work.

Key words: *Patriarchal Society and its Stereotypes, Religious Oppression, Gender Discrimination, Empowerment of Masculinity, Sisterhood, Sacrifice, Hope.*

1. Introduction

"And women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner," (Holy Qur'an, 2:228). A society is based on the equal, mutual but distinct contributions of both genders, male and female. But the contribution of females in the society has generally been overlooked to be no more important. The rules, values and customs in a society are made to favor men rather than women, encouraging gender discrimination, making society male-chauvinistic and male-oriented. Burki (2017) claims that a patriarchal society that practices gender discrimination consists of two parts: one that is privileged or favored and other unprivileged or not favored. Women or females fall into the unprivileged or not favored section in a patriarchal society. Gender discrimination is projects women's inferiority as innate attribute and women naturally considered submissive and obedient to men.

Burki (2017) and Taylor (1985) argue that a patriarchal society exercises various means to subjugate women culturally, politically, economically and socially by constructing rules and norms that explicate women's status always second to men and preach that women achieve meaning only in relation to men. Taylor (1985) remarks that a male dominant society makes women powerless, subjugated and inferior to men either based on unchallenged stereotypical beliefs or religious interpretation of gender. The construction of cultural meaning of women/females as inferior deprives them of many opportunities of equality in all possible means (Burki, 2017). The norms and decisions are always made by elders for women's lives to make them obedient and slave (Tylor, 1985). Rather than making them live as women, the patriarchal norms and values teach them to be slaves.

Tyson (2006) goes on to point out the stereotypes of a patriarchal society, social and cultural meaning given to sex and gender, concept of manhood, external and internal oppression, social oppression of women resulting psychological oppression, acculturation and de-centralization of women, labeling women as innate inferior and men as innate superior, deprivation and devaluation of women in all the disciplines of a patriarchal society and meaning of sexes based on

biological or cultural *constructionism*. Among various stereotypes women have generally been taken naturally inferior creature and second to man (Burki, 2017; Ann Philip, 2016). Another stereotypical norm used to oppress women's status in society is that of getting girls married in early age in a patriarchal society. Men marry as women as their religion or tribal stereotypical norms permit them in order to produce as many sons as possible. Women are used as baby producing machine and in case of failure they are treated brutally. Women are taught and trained to serve family as daughter, sister, wife and mother in a patriarchal and stereotypically conservative society like that of Afghanistan as portrayed in Khalid Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007).

This paper highlights women oppression and extermination in a patriarchal setup of Afghanistan in Khalid Hossen's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). The novel depicts Afghanistan in between the fall of soviet-union and clashes among militant and American forces. Thomson Reuters Foundation (June 26, 2018) in a survey enlists Afghanistan the second most dangerous country for women. The women in Afghanistan go through various issues including sexual violence, non-sexual violence, domestic violence, unavailability of medical facilitation, deprivation of economic resources and a lot more making them the most persecuted and exterminated in the society (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2018). Claire Fotheringham, an Australian Obstetrician/Gynecologist, while working in Afghanistan with Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors without Borders (MSF), at a maternity hospital in Khost, Afghanistan, observed the sever oppression of afghan women. She states that one of the major issues in afghan society is that "women are not free to make decisions within a family" (08 March, 2017). Fotheringham (2017) states that women, in order to have delivery in a facilitated hospital of MSF, had to travel long distances whereas the "road travel can be extremely dangerous due to chronic conflict in the country" (08 March, 2018). The paper discusses some other stereotypes in detail and the way female characters have struggled to stand against all those man-favoring stereotypes and patriarchal traditions in the selected novel. This study also highlights the way the female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) in the end stand for womanhood, femininity, sisterhood, and above all sacrifice and hope for the nation and women in Afghanistan.

2. Literature Review

Islam has declared a clear status of women in the society as "...and women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner," (Holy Qur'an, 2:228). Unlike men are accepted, the patriarchal set up never recognizes women as an equal member. Women, taken as inferior, naturally weak, and submissive, are

defined in relation to any other man. They do not determine their own existence in a society, says Eagleton (2008). In a patriarchal society as Tyson (2006) claims, women or girls are mainly characterized as *good girls* or *bad girls*, a result of “sexual ideology” (p 89). The ideology for women is constituted by men in a patriarchal society. The list of deeds that makes a woman good or bad always results in favor of men. “If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a ‘*good girl*’; if she doesn’t, she is a ‘*bad girl*’” (ibid). This makes women powerless for the patriarch society conceives women a mere object. Bhasin and Khan (1993) explain that the women are used as per terms and constitution of the patriarchal society and men without account of their personal perspectives, feelings, likes and dislikes, views and suggestions, visions and dreams. Because it is generally believed women’s personal accounts and considerations, opinions and perspectives, views and suggestions are not worth assertion to the society at all. Tyson (2006) observes that a patriarchal society always considers men as “essential subjects (independent selves with free will), while women are considered contingent beings (dependent beings controlled by circumstances)” (p 91). Men are born to give meaning to anything and the world around them. While women have no independent meaning, women’s meaning is always taken in relation to men. This makes women lack of all the qualities men have, or this difference makes women inadequate and faulty when put in comparison with men. A patriarchal society like Afghanistan’s enforces gender disparity (Moharil, 2017). This difference of women makes the very word ‘*women*’ imply the meaning of ‘*other*’ or ‘*second sex*’ worth no consideration. When the word ‘*women*’ is taken as *other*, this makes women as the ‘*second sex*’. “She is man’s other: she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man’s world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is” (Tyson, 2016, p 91).

2.1 Stereotypes of Patriarchal Society

Ann Philip (2016) points out some stereotypic rules and traditions in a patriarchal society as that of Afghanistan. She claims that patriarchal society is a society having rules and regulations set or made by men for women. This patriarchal society apart from various conservative rules is severely orthodox and discriminatory towards women (Ann Philip, 2016; Bhasin & Khan, 1993). These rules and principles make women powerless, derogatory, inferior, sabotaged, weak and submissive in a way men control and rule over all the disciplines and institutes of the society. Followings are the few stereotypes that help us understand the patriarchal constructionism and undermining of women in Afghanistan as portrayed in Khalid Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Ann Philip (2016) highlights that a patriarchal society gives the preference, and priority to male descendants over female ones. Another stereotypic concept that Ann Philip (2016) points out is that of forceful early marriages of girls without their consent. The girls are not even asked whether they like the man or not. In a patriarchal society a girl or a woman's consent never matters at all. Women are, as represented in the selected work, sabotaged by man's authority or power. They have never been given any right of choice or free will. Ann Philip (2016) argues that "only the elder members of the family can decide about their personal choices even when it comes to their lovers or future husbands" (p 792). Women or girls are considered as a moveable property to be moved from one house to another or a burden to get rid of by parents. The girls are always considered born to be just married, used like a toy, and reserved to the household errands as cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of husband or in-laws, and children. One of those stereotypical concepts of a patriarchal society is that of polygamy. Men feel pride in enjoying the life sexually by marrying more than one or two women. "Hosseini perpetuates the classical orientalist characterization of Muslim men as prototypes of sexual monstrosity and debauchery" (ibid). In a patriarchal society of Afghanistan polygamy is justified through the religious and militant beliefs. The marriage in a patriarchal society always undermines the capabilities and qualities of girls (Tyson, 2006, & Eagleton, 1999). It destroys the spirit of doing something that is supposed to be done by man only. Ann Philip (2016) and Bhasin & Khan (1993) speculate that a woman is always instilled with the idea that man is her protectors in the society. He is innate master, ruler, and ever-right person over women.

A man is known because of his manhood which is retained by victories, achievements, and brave actions. Moghadam (1993) and Tyson (2006) posit that if men fail in any discipline, it is generally conceived that it is the failure of manhood. In a patriarchal mindset, men are generally represented through actions that make them dominant, victorious, powerful, above all logical and reasonable. While the lack of these qualities are considered lack in male's manhood (Tyson, 2006; Cortright & Persinger, 2012). The disciplines where males generally show their manhood are not only social, economic, political and above all religious domains, but also in matrimonial relations to be sexually strong, aggressive, and violent in emotions. On the contrary, females are supposed to have womanhood when they are submissive, tolerant, passive, patient, enduring, obedient, and modest. This makes them earn the title of '*good wife*', '*good girl*', '*good mother*' or '*good woman*', because they abide by whatever commands are given to them. "In a traditional society (i.e., Afghanistan), women's value has been judged

by their fertility and their ability to bear the male children” (Akhtar at el, 2017, p 55).

2.2 Masculinity Empowered upon Femininity

In a patriarchal society like Afghanistan, women have generally been undermined and subjugated and conceived a weaker creation. They are unable work like man do in any political, economic, academic or social firm. They cannot protect themselves. They cannot walk alone the way men do as Thomson Reuters Foundation (June 26, 2018) reveals through a survey. Fotheringham (2017) states that in Afghanistan women are accompanied by man, relative by blood or nikah. The very belief that women are naturally weaker creation, they must be protected by men, is firmly implanted in Afghanistan. They must be in the custody of men to save the *namoos* (respect) and *nang* (honour) of family (Ann Philip, 2016; Suthr, 2013). In a patriarchal society, women have been embodied with the names of weaker, nimble and delicate objects. They have been considered as the flower, *gul* (a flower or rose), *mynah* (a bird), *malika*(queen), *moon*, *deer*, and *goat*. All these objects show the delicacy and nimbleness in **culcating** the weakness and docility in women. On the contrary, men are portrayed as braver as lions, as much intelligent as God, as much powerful as the sun, their qualities are always metaphored with all powerful and stronger objects of the nature (Tyson, 2006; Eagleton, 2008; Shameem, 2014; and Hooks, 2009). Imran and Gull (2015) focus on the female characters’ struggles and endeavors to search for the identity, to rebel against patriarchal setup, to challenge the stereotypes of male-chauvinistic society, and above all to overthrow the tag of being weak, powerless, subaltern, undermined, and irrational or emotional.

Moghadam (1993) discusses that the patriarchal structure is at its odds in many Islamic countries, but Afghanistan consists of a deep-rooted patriarchal structure and mindset in the society. The patriarchal setup is strengthened with religious orthodoxy and conservatism, political upheaval, and militant extremism in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Taliban regime uplifted extremism and incinerated women’s fundamental rights to education, health, politics and social activities. They justified their orthodoxy, brutality, deprivation of women of all fundamental rights, and gender discrimination with Islamic ideology which was always backed with militant or tribal man-favoring stereotypical mentality (ibid). The Taliban regime brought about tyrannous laws which forbad women to go out of home alone, prevented them to work in any organization, demolished girls’ schools and institutions, prohibited women to sing or write any piece of literature, women’s mobility and freedom was banned, were forced to wear burqa and cover whole body, prohibited them to use make-up, forced them not to visit bazaars without

company of any relative male, women were not allowed to see male doctors, and were limited to house only (Moghadam 1993; Dagamseh at el, 2017). This not only killed women's role, but destroyed their existence from society as well. Afghanistan has failed to re-establish the gender equality, re-enforce women's freedom and individuality due to patriarchal social existence, militant and religious orthodoxy, and weaker central state (Moghadam,1993). Gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexual harassment, early childhood marriages of girls, and decentralization of women from every walk of life replete in Afghanistan, reports UNAMA (2009). Fotheringham (2017) states that one of the major issues in afghan society is that "women are not free to make decisions within a family" (08 March, 2017).

Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* portrays such a patriarchal society where women exploitation, gender discrimination, women extermination, inequality, oppression of women, suppression of fundamental rights of women, militancy, religious orthodoxy, sexual harassment, and deprivation of women of all fundamental rights are portrayed through female characters; Mariam and Laila. The patriarchal society of Afghanistan as depicted enforces masculinity over femininity and would never tolerate women to work in social constructive progress sharing equality, mutuality, individuality, independence and freedom of expression in every walk of life (Siddiqui at el, 2015). This is generally considered as a great threat to already established idiosyncratic and patriarchal social setup backed with religious edicts and principles indoctrinated with militant or tribal mindset. Stuhr(2013) states that the female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* represent not only the women in Afghanistan, but the nation and land of Afghanistan simultaneously.

3. Theoretical framework

The paper studies the novel from the feminist perspective. Guerin, W.L., Labor, E., Morgan, L., Reesman, C. R., Willingham, J. R. (2005, p 222) argue that feminism focuses on the forces which mute and marginalize women in a patriarchal culture being purely in the favor of men. The gender description in a patriarchal society plays a distinctive role which represents men epitomized "as rational, strong, protective, and decisive" and women portrayed as "emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (Tyson, 2006,p 85). This picture of both sexes in a society deprives women of free will, element of choice, and decision-making power not only within a family, but in political, academic, social and cultural areas outside four walls of a house, reports Taylor (1985) in the World Report. A commonly cherished sexist belief in a patriarchal society is that women are inferior to men by birth and heredity (Tyson, 2006). Eagleton (2008)

explicates that the belief that destines women to be naturally inferior, is preached in a patriarchal society on the bases of biological differences that makes both men and women distinct and distant from each other. Feminism as a critical theory is helpful in distinguishing the philological interpretation of words like *sex* and *gender*. The word *sex* is interpreted as an individual's "biological constitution as female or male" (Tyson, 2006, p 86) whereas that of *gender* is an individual's "cultural programming as feminine or masculine" (ibid). This difference, based on biological and cultural interpretation and meaning, does not make women naturally inferior or feminine and men superior or masculine. However, this traditional categorization of sex and gender differences are instituted by society known as "*social constructionism*" (ibid). Guerin et al (2005, p 222) state that Gender Studies unfolds the way gender is more defined by the culture than it is by nature, determining women's meaning as a weakling and submissive.

Tyson (2006) professes that the stereotypical belief about men's sex/gender representing superiority and women's sex/gender inferiority is a cultural manipulation which empowers male monopoly "of positions of economic, political, and social power"..... which constitutes the rules and values undermining women's power and abilities to deprive them of "educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political, and social power" (p 86). The inferior position of women sustained since long in a patriarchal society is a cultural production not biological, argue Tyson (2006) and Walby (1990). The cultural manipulation that results patriarchy in a society, making women powerless and inferior, sabotages "women's self-confidence, and assertiveness" (Tyson, 2006, p 86). This strengthens the belief that women are, since the beginning, "self-effacing and submissive" creatures and no-match-to-men (ibid). Another stereotype Tyson (2006) highlights is that men's manhood is represented with the actions that make them dominant, victorious and powerful. The failure in any domain is generally conceived to be failure in a male's manhood. "The most sexually able...and to have the most anger and other violent emotions" represent the stereotypic belief of manhood in a patriarchal society (ibid). However, womanhood or femininity of women in such a society "is linked to frailty, modesty and timidity" (ibid). In other words, it does not suit a female or is not appropriate for a woman "to succeed in business, to be extremely intelligent, to earn big bucks, to have strong opinions, to have a healthy appetite (for anything), or to assert one's rights" (ibid).

Oppression of women is not only found in economic, political, and social spheres, but in domestic life as well. Their service is not valued and appreciated. They are recruited in a family as unpaid servants and maids (Eagleton, 2008; Guerin et al,

2005). Apart from economic, political and social deprivation and oppression of women in patriarchal society women also go through the psychological oppression and repression. This individual woman's psychological repression is triggered up due to patriarchal thinking that characterizes women as born to be passive and men as active. "Thus, if a woman is not passive, she is not really a woman. Of course, it follows that women are naturally submissive to men, that men are natural leaders, and so forth" (Tyson 2006, p 89). Furthermore, what have generally been accepted by many feminists as the biological differences that make women female and men male (as opposed to the differences socially constituted and imposed by patriarchy that define us as feminine and masculine) are seen as social differences rather than biological differences because of their concrete effects on women in the real world. As Tyson (2006) puts, the "sexual, biological, physiological, and reproductive difference (between women and men) reflects a difference in..... social contact" (p 90). What matters is not the biological difference, but the way meaning is assumed and displayed by the patriarchal society which is the social meaning implied on sexual difference that works as oppressive agents over women.

The selected theory of feminist criticism helps evaluate the female characters, their oppression, discrimination, marginalization, acculturation and their struggle to stand as a powerful creature against the patriarchal society of Afghanistan and its male favoring stereotypes in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

4. Methodology

The selected work is analyzed by using non-empirical method of Textual Analysis (TA) and Close Reading Method (CRD). Textual analysis as a data-gathering process is a way of educated interpretation, analysis and criticism of a text (Mckee, 2001). Through close reading method "the text is read closely and carefully, looking at why it's being said and how it's being said" (McGee, 2003, p 03). Textual Analysis unfolds the text as a whole and with all its possible parts whereas the close reading method helps evaluate the text after reading it thoroughly which retains the text as a whole and self-narrative piece of writing. Textual analysis is actually "the construction of knowledge about a text" (McGee, 2003, p 03). The interpretation through the textual analysis constitutes the meaning out of text and its discourse. Textual analysis aims to evaluate and explore "attitudes, behaviors, concerns, motivations, and culture of the text producer from an expert point of view" (Bauer, 2014, p 1). Interpretation through textual analysis does not mean the assessment of merits of the text or informing readers whether the book suits one's likes and dislikes or not rather a

depersonalized interpretation of text. That interpretation serves to be the central subject matter of evaluation, interpretation and analysis supported by evidences and reasons from a text and from others' critical evaluations or interpretations as well. In textual analysis the text receives primary attention and focus. The text is used "for an understanding of the structure and the interaction within" (McGee, 2003, p 5). TA unfolds the hidden meaning with "the use of concrete, specific examples from the text itself to validate our interpretations" within the text, dialogues, context, situations, statements, and above all the story of the novel (Tyson, 2006, p 135). By applying TA and CRM on the selected novel this paper evaluates the deeper meaning present in it. For this the characters, background situations, their conversational dialogues, and discourses, which reveal their verbal and psychological stream of thought from the selected text, are evaluated and analyzed by applying the TA and CRM in this paper. These methods would help readers be objectively critical and reflexive to read between the lines in the text and find out thoughtful meaning that text and characters reveal out. The paper by applying the TA and CRM analysis the selected text under feminist perspective to find out the way patriarchal mindset oppresses female characters and the way female characters struggle to achieve meaning.

5. Discussions

5.1 A Thousand Splendid Suns: A Distinct Picture of Patriarchal Society

The society that novel portrays is broadly divided into two major sections, men and women. Khalid Hosseini, the first American-Afghani writer, has exposed the real face of a patriarchal society which keeps women powerless, subjugated, undermined, sabotaged, deprived, unprivileged, and unaware of self and positions in a society. The very strategies and policies instituted, implemented and imposed on women are generally known as *social constructionism* (Tyson, 2006). Patriarchal society is mainly based on various stereotypes and male-favouring norms which ultimately would reveal the fear of rebel from the weaker or powerless section, women, infers Eagleton (2008). The novel presents the story of Afghanistan through three decades from the rule of Soviet Union to the clashes between Taliban and American forces. Mariam and Laila, two female characters, represent the plight of women in Afghanistan during these decades of civil wars and Taliban reign. The novel highlights the undermining of women's fundamental rights, restrictions on their education, subjugation of their choices and free will, sabotage of their liberty and freedom, deprivation of medical facilities, and above all ban on personal beautification within home (Ann Philip 2016; Souissi, 2016; Sabestien, 2017; Stuhr, 2013). It highlights "the forceful marriages, lack of freedom, lack of identity and torture that is perpetual towards the Afghan women" (Ann Philip, 2016, p791) in a patriarchal society. The patriarchal setting of

Afghanistan is a complex concoction of various ideologies ranging between tribal orthodox culture and Islamic fundamental principles (The Nation, 16 June, 2013). The report in The Nation (2013) states that among these ideologies, the society turns to be a hell for women to survive. *Social constructionism* and patriarchal setup labeled Mariam as a *harami*, illegitimate creature and weak, submissive, inferior, meek, dependent, and second or *other* to men. It made Mariam a crippled, powerless, and “a subaltern, an inferior woman in social, political and economic hierarchies” (Samina et al, 2017, p 113). Mariam’s mother says that women are destined to learn nothing, but “Only one skill and it's this: *Tahamul*, Endure” (Hosseini 2007, p 18). This endurance is not taught in schools but social, cultural and domestic oppression since birth teach this to women. From the very beginning, Nana, Mariam’s mother, has been shown living in a *Kobla*, a hut build out of city. Jalil belongs to elite class family where *namoos* and *haya* are the first priority for families. He falls in love with Nana and has an illegal affair with her. The result of that relationship was Mariam, a bastard, a *harami*, an illegitimate daughter of Nana. She was named a *harami* by the very society from where Jalil, a respectful man, had an illegal relationship with Nana. Furthermore, in such a patriarchal society, the word ‘woman’ is generally taken to be illogical and emotional. Women are taken next to nothing. No consent, opinion, advice, view, thought or consideration from women is considered to be logical. This patriarchal mentality is also reflected there through the words of a judge in the novel, “I wonder..... God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can..... This is why we require only one male witness, but two female ones” (Hosseini 2007, p 324). Women are taken irrational, too much emotional, without sense, in a patriarchal society and every illogical and irrational thing is associated with women. Rasheed in the very beginning of the story said that “superstitions were largely a female preoccupation” (Hosseini 2007, p 58). That’s why patriarchal men like Rasheed believe that it is their duty to teach woman how to be a girl, a good daughter, a mother and a good wife as he says to Mariam, “I expect you to start behaving like good wife” (Hosseini 2007, p 59). The word ‘wife’ would have been quite enough to tell her or remind her, but word “good wife” determines that there are two main categories in the status of wife, good wife and bad wife. What makes a wife good or bad? Is not decided by women, but by the patriarchal society argues Tyson (2006). Men have taken the charge to decide which wife is good or bad. If a woman follows what a man asks her to follow and do what a man orders her to do, that submissiveness before man and patriarchal society makes a woman good wife, however, in case the man is defied and is not followed, the woman is treated as an alien, bad, vulgar, immoral, and above all whore in a society (Souissi 2016). The women from Nana to Aziza, little daughter of Laila, are subjugated,

oppressed, depressed, undermined, abandoned, brutally abused, and ruthlessly tortured, and inhumanely punished under the umbrella of patriarchal society in which men are inherently dominant and are given birth right to rule over weaker creation which is always women. “The power of patriarchy is rendered through illegitimacy, marriage, and gender discrimination” (Ann Philip, 2016, p 52). Mariam and her mother Nana represent the lower class women who “are constantly tortured and deprived of fully realizing their capabilities. They lack the courage and strength to bluntly resist the standard norms of the society and are ragged between the conventional norms and their own emotions” (Samina at el 2017, p114). Rasheed shows the cruel face of a patriarchal society. He becomes cruel and savage when Mariam fails to give him a baby due to miscarriage. He believes in manhood by marrying more than one woman. He always imposes religious principles on Mariam and Laila, whereas, he never follows them himself. He believes that he is a man thus vows to protect his wives. He imposes *burqa or parda* on his wives and uses religion as an excuse to subjugate and undermine women’s capabilities and nature.

5.2 Religion used as an Excuse to Suppress Women

Rasheed was a conservative man, he believed in orthodox approaches of Islam, as the society Rasheed was living, was too much patriarchal. He believed in the complete practice of Islam, as *pardah* for women, women being limited to house and household errands. When it comes to his credibility as a true Muslim, Rasheed himself did not practice upon what he professed. As he did not keep all the fasts of Ramadan and was sexually frustrated and exhausted. Greater part of his life as a widower made him feel sexually frustrated and obsessed. He kept in his room the porn and nude photos of women as well, which is even against the Islamic principles. Here comes the hypocrisy of religiously conservative society. Once he said Mariam, “A woman’s face is her husband’s business” (Hosseini 2007, p 63) seemed to be male supporting and male chauvinistic attitude and Mariam turned pale when she found the nude and porn pictures or magazines in his room.

Sebastian (2016) furthermore argues that Religion when blended with militant and patriarchal mentality is used as one of the most dangerous weapons against women in a society like Afghanistan. Because of his fanatic, militant or orthodox and patriarchal society, Rasheed found excuses from religion to force both Mariam and Laila to put on *Burqa* or wear a *hijab* in order to maintain or sustain the *haya*, *namoos* or *sharam* and respect. This covering and hiding of women is mainly used to undermine women’s freedom and power and use them as an object that Rasheed believed is property of husbands or business of men only. One of the

best examples of Rasheed's use of religion as an excuse is at the moment when he forced Mariam on bed to have sex, "There is no shame in this Mariam", he said, slurring a little. "It's what married people do. It's what the Prophet and his wives did. There is no shame" (Hosseini 2007, p76). Mariam and Laila represent marginalization, devaluation, subjugation and degradation of women in patriarchal Afghanistan where religion is generally blended with tribal norms and used as an excuse to suppress women.

5.3 Gender Discrimination and Forms of Oppression over Women:

Dagameh, A. M. & Golubeva, O. (2017) argue that the oppression of women in a patriarchal society is partially based on gender discrimination and partially on social, cultural, political and religious discrimination which not only result in physical, but psychological oppression as well by undermining their faculty of recognizing the power of free will and choice. Violence in any patriarchal society as that of Afghanistan is always practiced through two different structures as the "repressive and ideological structures" (Wulandari, 2009). The government, the law court, and the police form up the repressive structure whereas religion and family constitute the ideological structure of oppression (Althusser, 2008). A patriarchal society considers men as self-narrative and women are defined in relation and comparison to men. Women are deprived of position in various disciplines and values of society because being women or second sex to men, they are conceived unable or inappropriate for social participation. The differences between men and women are commonly differences in biological constitutions as sex or gender (Tyson, 2006; Eagleton 2008). The biological differences are interpreted from cultural point of view. The common belief in a patriarchal society like Afghanistan is that of men's superiority and female's inferiority is a sexist notion, argues Tyson (2006). Rasheed is a man with this belief that women have no sense and logic. He considers all the superstitions as production of women. He believed that "A woman's face is her husband's business" (Hosseini, 2007, p 63).

Wunlandari (2009) claims that Mariam and Laila are the representation of oppressed women in the Afghanistan. She has come up with five types of oppression that Mariam and Laila face such as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Exploitation of Mariam is that she was considered as servant work without wages, to an object and a toy to be used and to be played with. Mariam is treated ruthlessly and was offended every moment Rasheed found a chance. "when he (Rasheed) does, pointing Mariam's fault, is like the employer who is not satisfied with the slave's work, and indirectly he wants Mariam to do better and command her to avoid her fault in the

other times” (Wulandari, 2009, p 25). Marginalization or alienation is a form of oppression that expels women from active participation in the social life the way Mariam and Laila are marginalized and alienated. The women, in general, were prohibited from working in the office, to walk around the streets and bazaars, to walk without the company of a *mahram* (a blood relative), to show the face to people, to speak with men until spoken to and above all prohibited to wear nail polish, and charming clothes Ann Philip (2016) and Sebastian (2017) discuss. This oppression killed Mariam’s abilities and talent from the very childhood by being entitled as ‘*harami*’ and deprived her of fundamental education as well. Later on her forceful marriage with Rasheed and his tyrannous- dominance and ruthless behavior made her mentally crippled and socially isolated or marginalized. Powerlessness of women is another form of oppression portrayed in the selected novel and indicated by Wulandari (2009) and Ann Philip (2016). Mariam was made powerless when it came to her marriage. Her right to agree or disagree, accept or deny was sabotaged because of stereotypical set up that marriages are decided by elders of a girl and a girl who wants to have power of selection of her groom is entitled as a ‘*bad girl*’ explicates Tyson (2006, p 89). Another reason behind her being powerless was that when, for the first time, she had taken a decision by using her will power to get out of *kobla* and search for Jalil, she faced psychological suppression due to suicide her mother committed. Next, she never dared to use her free will to take any decision in her life. After her marriage with Rasheed, she went through many miscarriages. Those miscarriages brought about the demolition and shattering of Rasheed’s hope to be a father again. Rasheed’s attitude and behavior towards Mariam turned to be ruthless and savage. Similarly, Laila, though enjoyed her life willfully in her childhood, faced the same oppression of being powerless after her marriage with Rasheed. She has been forced to practice *pardah* and is used as a baby producing machine for Rasheed. Their will-power was curbed when they tried to escape away or leave Rasheed’s house. Rasheed locked them for many days without providing them food, water or even milk for little Aziza who reached the very edge of death. Rasheed wanted “them to believe that they are powerless and unable to fight against him”(Wulandar, 2009, p 40).

Another form of oppression that Wulandari (2009) finds out is that of cultural imperialism that is the dominance of male section over the section of women in a society. Due to this dominance, women have been suppressed badly in every walk of life. Cultural imperialism within a society defines people as dominant and dominated, oppressor and oppressed, suppressor and suppressed. In this context the dominant, oppressor and suppressor are men whereas the dominated, oppressed, and suppressed are women (Tyson, 2006; Eagleton, 2008; Althussers,

2008). In other words, cultural imperialism is a part of patriarchal society and constitutes very rigid and firm rules for women: the society where men are powerful and women powerless, males are superior and females inferior and husbands are oppressors and wives oppressed. This cultural imperialism and patriarchal society have been constituted with the rules and regulations mostly in favor of males and against the freedom and liberty of women. Violence, physical in the first stage resulting in psychological, is another form of oppression Wulandari (2009) expounds.

Sebastian(2016) and Suthr (2013) have studied the suppression and subjugation of female characters and have evaluated the lives and mentality of women in a patriarchal society facing the bitter discrimination and oppression based on man-made rules, religious and political bias, social and cultural marginalization and alienation. The cruelty and brutality, savagery and inhumanity of Rasheed reached its extreme level one day when he shoveled pebbles and small stones into Mariam's mouth and forced her jaws close and asked her to chew them. All cruelty he committed to avenge her being infertile and not giving him a child. "Now you know what you have given me in this marriage. Bad food and nothing else" (Hosseini, 2007, p 94).His cold attitude and harsh treatment represents his sadistic and bestial side of patriarchal society (Neupane & Khanal, 2017). "It wasn't easy tolerating him talking this way to her, to bear his scorn, his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat" (Hosseini, 2007, p 89). She was always afraid of his continuously shifting temper and moods, "on occasions, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks, and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not" (Hosseini, 2007, p 89). She tried her best to win him back but failed and in vain. "Mariam dreaded the sound of him coming home in the evening. The key rattling, the creak of door---there was always something, some minor thing that would infuriate him, because no matter what she did to please him, no matter how thoroughly she submitted to his wants and demands, it wasn't enough" (Hosseini, 2007, p 90). He would find it to pounce on her, to beat her and ultimately punish her not because she did something wrong, but because she seemed to fail him in returning his son, and she seemed to be burden on him due to her infertility or inability to bear the children. Failing to provide a child to Rasheed pushed Mariam towards his wrath and volatile temper and savage beatings. "Male dominance in Afghan society is clearly exhibited in Rasheed's demeanor and ill-treatment of Mariam's abortions" (Samina et al 2017, p 114).

5.4 Various Conflicts Female Characters Face

Neupane and Khanal (2017) have come up with the reasons behind Rasheed's aggressive behavior towards women. They categorize Rasheed's physical aggression due to her miscarriages considered deliberate and conscious. Secondly Rasheed became quite aggressive and savage on Mariam and Laila's attempt to escape or leave Afghanistan or his house. Another reason that Neupane and Khanal (2017) postulate that the worsening conditions and scarcity of food and livelihood made him aggressive and abusive towards his wives and little Aziza.

Neupane and Khanal (2017) claim that there is a sort of transformation in Rasheed's aggressive attitude and behavior towards Mariam in first and Laila in second. After the first miscarriage, Rasheed became indifferent and cold in behavior towards Mariam and became volatile or hyper-tempered whenever Mariam interrupted his silence or questioned about anything. This Neupane and Khanal (2017) call an initial stage of aggressive attitude which was mainly due to Rasheed's loss of hope for a male descendent. This, later on, after continuous miscarriages turned towards more savage and volatile aggression. Rasheed started beating and abusing Mariam on negligible faults as in cooking and speaking. Rasheed's savage and brutal uncontrollable behavior or aggressive attitude towards his wives reached its extreme level when they tried to leave or escape from his house, but failed. Neupane and Khanal (2017) have tried to explain the reasons behind the aggressive attitude as justified. However, they have explained the male-chauvinistic attitude of Rasheed deeply rooted in cultural, social, political and conservative or orthodox religious tenets.

Shameem (2014) expresses that the character of Mariam succumbed with the conflicts, both psychological and social or internal and external conflicts. She categorizes external conflicts as Mariam's conflict with her mother Nana, later on with her husband Rasheed and above all Mariam's conflict with the patriarchal society and rules set for women. These factors are explored under the study of factors which trigger them up as Mariam's being entitled as *harami* since her childhood by Nana leaves a repressive influence as her childhood's harsh and rigorous experience influence imperiously her adult life.

The patriarchal social setup and means of oppression, exploitation, violence, extermination, marginalization, and suppression used by male-chauvinistic society fails to break the confidence, resistance, urge to get freedom and determination to face the patriarchal society of female characters in the novel. "They share the same pain and agony and undergo similar stereotypical trails of being women in Afghanistan" (Ann Philip, 2016, p 791). Hosseini has presented a

clear and vivid picture of a deeply rooted patriarchal society by portraying and representing women in the nation through Mariam and Laila: representing those who were from the educated and secular family and those who were deprived of education, suppressed, and socially discriminated. The fate of both women having distinctively different background goes through commonly shared phases of life.

6. Results

6.1 Mariam and Laila: Representing Degradation and Devaluation of Women in Patriarchal Society:

Mariam wanted to go to school and learn with other girls of same age, but being deprived of all the rights and denied of legitimacy and fatherhood, she was deprived of going to school unlike her half-sisters, Saidah and Naheed. Her desire to go to school was subjugated and undermined with the words from her mother, “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 *Tahamul*; Endure”(Hosseini, 2007, p 18). This explicates that in a patriarchal society woman, considered with derogatory and resentful eyes, is forced to be submissive, blind, deaf and dumb followers and subjugated to men only. Fear of title, fear of men, fear of people, fear of society, fear of bringing shame, disrespect and humiliation to family, is all what a woman is considered to possess and occupy. The patriarchal thinking is not just reflected by men only, sometimes women have been instilled unconsciously and brainwashed to speak for patriarchal rules as women surrounding Mariam in a market did reveal out that, “boy is better, Mariam Jan, they carry the family name” (Hosseini 2007, p 61). In a patriarchal society, girls are mostly considered to be born for working within the boundaries of a house. They are trained to be submissive, meek, obedient, and silent which would make them good wives after marriage. The patriarchal family never considers a girl to be a true heir of family the way a boy is. A girl is brought up to be sent to others’ house whereas a boy is brought up to be the lineage carrier and bread winner for family. The desire to have a boy is a deep seated stereotypical belief in the patriarchal society. Patriarchal society never pays any heed towards women as it believes women to be inferior, weaker, and naturally meaningless due to gender or sex causing discrimination and oppression in all the sectors of the society.

6.2 Sisterhood between Mariam and Laila

The sisterhood built up between Mariam and Laila is one of the best companionship between two subjugated and oppressed women, under the tyrannous dominance and torturous behavior of Rasheed (Sebastian, 2016). Sebastian (2016) and Shameem (2014) study the importance of sisterhood built up between Mariam and Laila in order to accompany each other in such a torturous

and tyrannous conditions of both inside and outside home of Rasheed. That sisterhood was not based on blood relations rather on the pure solidarity and love of femininity, says Shameem (2014). The common tragic journey of life and agony united them strongly. “They used to abuse each other calling each other many names until they realized that they are undergoing the same tragic fate under this abusive man and then they started to realize each other and started to share their strength of endurance to each other” (Sebastian, 2016, p55). This relationship of sisterhood provides immense power to Mariam to have a hope and regain her courage for the sake of Laila and her children (Singh, 2013). The relationship in which they protect each other, share common pain and antagonism, show sympathy and hope for each other in such a patriarchal society where women are considered to be worthless and unpaid servants is known as sisterhood of women. The sisterhood is not based on blood relationship, rather the common destiny and pain cements both women’s affinity and affection. “In a male dominant Afghan society, coming together in a group is difficult for women but the understanding of at least these two women is representative of the determined and unyielding effort of women” (Samina et al,2017, p 117). This was their sincere sisterhood that empowered Mariam finally to decide for herself and sacrifice for Laila and her children. In other words, the persistent and continuous repression of harsh, painful, turbulent and troublesome or unbearable violation, aggression and beatings of Rasheed were turned to make Mariam rebel against patriarchal holdings and values of society. “Mariam represents those women who endeavor hard to be conventional and abide by the roles that are specified by the society and their culture, but are unfortunately compelled to take the affairs into their own hands” (Samina et al,2017, p 117). Mariam’s step of killing her husband was to protect Laila and her children is a great ray of hope for all those suppressed, deprived, subjugated, and undermined women in a patriarchal setup. “When she succumbs to the death, she is actually living her life in its fullest at the hearts of Laila and her children” (Sebastian, 2016, p 58-59). Laila found a motherly figure in Mariam. **Whereas, Mariam found her lost children in Laila and her children.** The sisterhood is the strongest bond to resist the brutality and cruelty of patriarchal oppression and gender discrimination.

7. Conclusion

Hosseni’s depiction of afghan society is fascinating and a marvelous way of narration and portrayal of characters that compel readers to feel the pain of Mariam, Laila, Aziza, Tariq, and in particular the sufferings they and the entire nation went through as victimized, oppressed, and suppressed. The nation, in general and Laila’s life in particular move towards the improvement, rebuilding what was lost and ruined, reproducing both happiness out of rubbles and making

themselves able to contribute in reconstruction of entire land or country. This is what makes this story to be one of the most fascinating and lovely. The author has depicted the lives of Afghan nation and Laila as analogous to each other. The end of both Afghan as a land or nation and Laila resembles with each other that is rebuilding up every road towards hope and happiness, reconstructing the past glory of music and cinema, reorganizing the social and political values, reopening the institutes where girls and women can study and work, and contributing in history and nations simultaneously.

Each miserable character in the novel goes through a sort of process of transformation or development. It would not be wrong to say that each miserable character has a transformation from merely an inexperienced to experience one or a development that characters have moved on towards maturity by facing the hardships, troubles, pain and grief or loss of hope and faith. The relation between Mariam and Laila namely their sisterhood strengthened Mariam to sacrifice for Laila and Laila turned to be a great hope for the reconstruction of nation. The misconception that women are weaker creatures and are unable to contribute into the society has been refuted through the female characters' struggle and resistance. In the end, the female characters' endeavor to achieve meaning inculcates the falsehood and baselessness of all those patriarchal norms in Afghanistan. The relationship of sisterhood embodies the strength, power, confidence, and self-esteem in women in a patriarchal society. In the end, the female characters stood bold, brave and daring to challenge the patriarchal norms and values by airing the importance of being women not as weaker, innate fragile, meaningless, and ever-obedient, but a strong, willful, meaningful and determined section of society.

References

- “Afghanistan: The 1st most Dangerous Country for Women.” *The Nation*, 16 June, 2013, [online web] Accessed on 24 September, 2018. URL: <http://www.nation.com.pk/Afgahanistan-news-2011/Afghanistan-1st-most-dangerous-country-for-women>.
- “Factbox: Which are the world's 10 most dangerous countries for women?” Thomson Reuters Foundation. 26 June, 2018. [online web] accessed on 22 December, 2018. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-dangerous-poll-factbox/factbox-which-are-the-worlds-10-most-dangerous-countries-for-women-idUSKBN1JM01Z.html>

Althusser, L. (2008), *On Ideology*, trans. Ben Brewster.

- Alexander, A. C., & Welzel, C. (2011), How robust is Muslim support for patriarchal values? A cross-national multi-level study.
- Philip, B. A. (2016), Endless endurance: A feminist study of Khaled Hossieni's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 2(5), 791-801.
- Akhtar, S., Rauf, M., Ikram, S., & Raees, G. (2017), A Legitimate End to Illegitimate Beginning: A Critical Analysis of Mariam's Character in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 7(1), 113-9.
- Balatchandirane, G. (2007), *Gender Discrimination in Education and Economic Development: A Study of Asia*. External Trade Organization, Japan.
- Bressler, C. E. (1999), *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Burki, S. J. (2017), Treatment of women in Pakistan. [accessed 25 September, 2018) available from The Express Tribune, Pakistan: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1515421/treatment-women-pakistan/>
- Cortright, D., & Persinger, S. S. (2010), *Afghan Women Speak: Enhancing Security and Human Rights in Afghanistan*. University of Notre Dame.
- Dagamseh, A. M. & Golubeva, O. (2017), "Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a Child-Rescue and Neo-Orientalist Narrative" *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. 19.4: <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3057.html>
- Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fotheringham, C. (08 MAR 17). Afghanistan: One of the most dangerous places on earth to have a baby :*Australian Obstetrician/Gynecologist Afghanistan (online web)* accessed on 20 December, 2018. URL: <https://www.msfg.org.uk/article/afghanistan-one-most-dangerous-places-earth-have-baby.html>
- Hosseini, K. (2007), *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. New York: ATSS Publication.

- Hooks, B. (2000), *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Pluto Press.
- Joyia , M, I, & Gull, A. (2015), *Courageous Women: A Study of Resilience of Women in Khaled Hosseini's Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns. International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2, 2.
- Kazemiyan, A. (2012), *A Thousand Splendid Suns; Rhetorical Vision of Afghan Women (Doctoral dissertation, Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa)*.
- Kusnadi, N. H. (2008), *An analysis of the main character Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns through feminism approach*.
- Moghadam, V. M. (1993), *Patriarchy and the Politics of gender in modernizing societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 13(1_and_2), 122-133.
- Moharil, M. (2017), *New Saga of Gender Friendliness (Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns). International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3(7).
- Neupane, D., & Khanal, R. (2017), *Reasons behind Spousal Aggression in A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini. Journal of Advanced Academic Research*, 4(1), 117-124.
- Pepelar, P. (2008), *What is Freedom?: Perceptions of Freedom of Women in Two Novels from Afghanistan; A Thousand Splendid Suns and Behind the Burqa*.
- Pertiwi, D. R., & M Thoyibi, M. S. (2016), *Ethnicity In Khaled Hosseini's Novels (The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, Andand The Mountain Echoed): A Sociological Approach (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta)*.
- Silima, N. (2013), *Subjugation: A Study of the Woman Characters in Khalid Hosseini's and Arundhati Roy's Novels. International Journal of English and Literature*, 4(10), 456-461.
- Shameem, B. (2014), *Living on the Edge: Women in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 2(4), 62-66.

- Sebastian, A. (2016), Feminine Power as Represented In Khaled Hosseini's The Thousand Splendid Suns. *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, 4, 11, pp 51-58.
- Singh, N. (2013), Feminism v/s Gender equity: Socio-Political Activism in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, 4(2), 88-92.
- Souissi, R. (2016), Drawing the Human Face of a Homeland: A Reading of Khaled Hosseini's Novels; The Kite Runner, A thousand Splendid Suns, and And the Mountains Echoed. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)* ISSN 2356-5926, 2(2), 491-498.
- Sruthi, P. (2014), Gender Bias Crossways Borders with Reference to Khalid Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. *IOSR journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 49-51.
- Stuhr, R. (2013), A Thousand Splendid Suns: Sanctuary and Resistance; Critical Insights: Cultural Encounters.
- Thompson, H. (2009), A Thousand Splendid Suns: The Plight of Afghan Women only Partially Depicted.
- Tyson, L. (2006), *Critical Theory Today*. New York: London. Library of Congress.
- Wulandari, S. (2009), *The Oppression Against Women in Afghanistan Portrayed In Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Universitas Pesantren Tinggi Darul Ulum Jombang.
- Walby, S. (1990), *Theorizing Patriarchy*. London: Blackwell, Oxford UK and Cambridge MA.
- Walby, S. (1992), Woman and Nation. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 33(1), 81.