

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

Mohd Rashid, PhD Research Scholar,

Department of English and MEL, Faculty of Arts, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, India

Abstract: The study of this research paper examines the status of female in patriarchal social setup. The leading voices against patriarchy; include Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, and Helene Cixous. The study seeks to explore concise illustration of female concerns in various literary works. The paper observes the women characters from Afghan tradition who have been the victims of male dominance. This paper also throws a light on the women as the victims of male dominance in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The paper tries to scrutinize Afghan as a masculine civilization in Muslim patriarchal context of the country. Thus, It is important to shed light on the equal freedom of female in social set up.

Index Terms - Women, family, salvation, male supremacy, and freedom.

I. INTRODUCTION

The scholarship of female issue is the topic of long discussion. It is general aspect that women have been deprived of their rights from over the decades because of the pre-established patriarchal system. The presumed universality of patriarchy has emerged as the cause of existential plight of females. The hegemonic and artificial nature of patriarchy has monopolized entire existence of female. It has given momentum to the idea of objectification of women. Several feminist of the contemporary age have endeavoured to crack the matrices of stereotypical assumptions imposed by patriarchal structure of society.

In Afghan society the women have been trapped in the boundaries set by the patriarchal organization. The condition of women in Afghan is majorly affected by the patriarchal system. In his fictional narrative, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini argues a woman's greatest and most significant function that is to get married. Many marriages are arranged, and most often the husband is much senior in age than the wife. There is a brief description of female identity by the luminaries of this field.

In her well known piece of writing, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir writes: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that determines this creature" (Beauvoir 1). Beauvoir brilliantly advocates several freedoms of women under the shadow of patriarchy, so that they could be free from all kinds of patriarchal subordination. In patriarchal system, woman's status under the patriarchy as the *Other* is a socially constructed fact rather than an fundamental reality about the female gender.

On the other hand, Julia Kristeva, a strong supporter of female concerns and her relation to feminism and feminist theory is one of great ambivalence. She is however, seen as one of the major French feminists, who are committed to the deeper analysis of the interrelations between language, perceived as phallogocentric, and sexually specific types of subjectivity. She writes: "strictly speaking, "woman" cannot be said to exist" (Kristeva 404).

The important works of Michel Foucault have been extremely powerful for his aspects on discipline, power, sexuality and subjectivity are mostly relevant at the present. Woman as other is low-grade but also unknowable, enigmatic and disquieting in every field. Its uncontrolled sexuality must be controlled and inherent weakness of character exposed, mostly as it is mainly a reproductive human. Foucault makes few references to women or to the issue of gender in his writings, his treatment of the relations between power, the body

and sexuality has motivated widespread feminist interest. Helene Cixous is a French feminist critic who has already left a permanent mark on feminist literary theory.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-born American novelist and physician. In Afghanistan, he spent his first eight years. When he was fifteen years of age, his family sought political protection in the United States, where he attended California schools and received a medical degree before he turned to writing. Many critics evaluate *A Thousand Splendid Suns* with Hosseini's well-received first novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003), but the general agreement is that the newer book is more fully realized.

Khaled Hosseini has written about the plight of Afghan women along with the socio-political scenario of Afghanistan. His novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the troubles of women behind the walls of Afghanistan during several attacks in the country. The issue of feminism and female concerns has been raised through the characters of Mariam and Laila. Both of their destinies are attached throughout a terrible twist of situations. On the other hand, because of the position of women in the society, their choices are forced on them. Mariam had to marry Rasheed a shoemaker who is many years elder to her, as her father and his wives compel her to do so. Her acceptance in the novel is just a token of act. Laila, the other protagonist had to marry Rasheed because she was orphaned and pregnant. Both situations are untenable in her society. *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And the Mountain Echoed* (2013) are well known fictional narratives by Hosseini. These novels were most victorious and they had sold over 38 million copies across 70 countries of the world.

The novel stresses over the rights women were not given along with the restrictions to education, choices and liberation that restrict their great potentials in the male dominated world. Male dominance over the women in Afghanistan is a major concern that relates this novel to feminist characteristic. Forceful marriages, lack of freedom, lack of identity, limited space in terms of mental, social, cultural and psychological level and torture that was perpetrated towards the Afghan women are the issues by the feminists across the universe.

Khaled Hosseini has been analyzing the situation of women in Afghanistan, not through the ideological formulation of before and after the Taliban, but within the bigger historical context of Afghanistan. Through his outlook women can be seen as integral to the rebuilding of the Afghan land. The recycling of a well-known nineteenth-century colonial narrative of saving women was accompanied by the new status and journalistic records of subjugated Afghan women.

This is an important case with most of the women in Afghanistan. They were treated as an object not as a human. The other sufferer, Mariam constantly faced and blamed for conditions that were out of her power. She never did something immoral, yet had to suffer a lifetime of hardship. She was a unselfish human being cursed for being a woman. Her endless plagued her as well, in ways we would see it would not have had she been a boy. These lines are the visionary lines by Mariam's mother when she was a infant that came factual in her existence after some years,

In a few years this little girl will be a woman who will make small demands on life, who will never burden others, who will never let on that she too has had sorrows, disappointments, dreams that have been ridiculed. A woman who will be like a rock in a Riverbed, enduring without complaint, her grace not sullied but shaped by the turbulence that washes over her (Hosseini 4).

The History of Afghanistan had its relation on the people, mostly the women living in country. Mariam could have had an enhanced life, if she had not gone to Jalil's house, instead staying with her mother. Yet, that would not have bugged the Civil War, Soviet invasion, Taliban, or the vision of a dissimilar but similarly cruel husband. Mariam's destruction was beyond her control. This portrays the function of sociopolitical state on the life of Afghan women who are mistreated from all regions. Laila's effort was a dissimilar one to Mariam's. She grew up with pleasure, affection and liberty, her move from everything to nothing was uncomfortable.

These were the conditions through which Afghan women were going during the disgusted control of Taliban. It is love that draws characters beyond their separation that gives them the power to surpass their own restrictions, to expose their weaknesses, and to carry out shocking actions of self-sacrifice. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* shows the socio-

cultural and political formations that hold up the depression, poverty, and violence endured by the main characters of the novel *Mariam and Laila*. Severely undermining women's human rights, they had to bear everything in the narrative. There is a question that male and female both take birth with the similar method of pregnancy of their mother while progressively activities of gradation starts by the social order and the same civilization starts maintaining the rank and level.

In Afghanistan society one can discover this case in extreme. The women in the novel often work to keep hope while dealing with the realities of political and individual subjugation. One of the important points throughout the novel is that characters express their personal hopes. For example, when Mariam asks Mullah Faizullah if she may attend school, and thus her trip of hope starts. For Laila, hope lies in Tariq and an attempted flee from Rasheed. The majority of the characters walk into such events with elevated levels of hope for the future, but once realism sets in, a character's hope is crushed. Therefore, in the novel, these waves of hope provide the reader with expectation and emotional connection to the characters and this cycle appears to reproduce the cycles of hope and dashed visions that Afghan women experience over the period of time.

The individual stories of expectation are mirrored in the political hope of the Afghan citizens. Jalil and Rasheed emphasize the significance of their reputations by doing their best to keep away from any shame to their names.

The women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have very different educational experiences. Mariam is tutored by Mullah Faizullah in the Quran, and she learns how to read and write. Yet, when she asks her mother about going to school, Nana insists that the only lesson that Mariam needs to learn is to endure. This shows the social set up against women who were made to learn endurance since their childhood. While on the other hand Laila's father emphasizes the importance of her education. Hakim diligently works with Laila on her homework and provides her with extra work in order to expand her education. He emphasizes that Laila's education is as important as that of any boy. After the streets of Kabul become too dangerous, he insists on tutoring Laila himself. Aziza is educated by both Laila and Mariam, who contribute what they know in order to educate her. Mariam teaches the Koran, and Laila eventually volunteers to teach at her school.

The women forge strong bonds despite the efforts of their husbands and their government to reduce women's power. The bonds differ in nature. For instance, Giti, Hasina, and Laila form a bond of girlish friendship, but Mariam and Laila form a much more powerful familial bond later in the novel. Nana finds strength from her daughter Mariam, and Mariam finds an admirer when she arrives in a Taliban controlled prison. The novel thus suggests that women have a strong ability to find strength and support in one another. Mariam never would have gained the strength to fight Rasheed if she had not gained confidence and love from Laila. The Supreme Court under Rabbani was filled with hardliner mullahs who did away with the communist-era decrees that empowered women and instead passed rulings based on Shari'a, strict Islamic laws that ordered women to cover, forbade their travel without a male relative, punished adultery with stoning.

The women are cruelly beaten and confined on their return "home," and when their husband releases them, starving and broken, they and he know the truth of his words: "You try this again and I will find you. I swear on the Prophet's name that I will find you. And, when I do, there isn't a court in this godforsaken country that will hold me accountable for what I will do." These are the words spoken by Rasheed to Laila depicting his male dominance over hapless women. Rasheed's words are the representation of the social structure against the women during the reign of Taliban. When the Taliban move in Afghanistan, the control they assert over women's conduct and liberties was just an extreme form of what women in Afghanistan were already enduring. Transferring completely to the public sphere what has been considered acceptable already in the household namely, the horrors inflicted on women by men who cannot be held accountable.

The female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Sons*, connects female concerns and feminism by accentuating the parallels between the class and gender struggle facing by them. In the novel, Rasheed's marriage to Mariam and Laila is one important depiction of marriage in patriarchal social set up in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Laila's parents married for affection. Laila's father is in the weaker position in the marriage, with the mother

influencing decisions and the mood of family life. Nana, Mariam's mother, had been engaged to a young man in the more usual behavior of an arranged wedding. This rejection was a shame that Nana carried with her to her end of life. Mariam's father, Jalil, has a number of wives in the same way as Rasheed. Jalil and his wives are well-matched and all make decisions together. The wives together are capable to control Jalil to marry off Mariam, a result that he accepts but shortly apologizes for.

Thus, the oppression of women in Afghanistan is linked to a world of male dominance most significantly associated with the Islamic fundamentalist group the Taliban in the early 1990s. It was during this period that the last signposts of Marxism were torn down, and the rights of women were completely abolished. For Mariam and Laila, the day the Taliban rolled their tanks through Kabul was not their first encounter with repression, but it was the final event that would bolster their feminist ideals and lead them on a journey to reinstate the values of gender and class justice that was sorely missed. Mariam's Journey from unwanted child towards a belittled and barren wife shows the wretched plight of Afghan women.

Works Cited:

- Adamec, Ludwig. *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*. Scarecrow Press, 2003.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, 1949.
- Emadi, Hafizullah. *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan*. C.T. Praeger, 2002.
- Hosseini, Khalid. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Riverhead, 2007.
- Ibid, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan Vintage, 1978.
- Foster, Jones. "Women's fates entwine as Afghanistan spirals into war." San Francisco Chronicle, 2007.
- Julia Kristeva, "Woman Can Never Be Defined," translated by Marilyn A. August, in *New French Feminisms*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, 1981.
- Shaikh, Amad. Book Review: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini. Muslim Mattersorg, 2007.
- Singh, Namita. "Feminism v/s Gender equity: Socio-Political Activism in Hosseini, Khaled." *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Riverhead, 2007.
- Skaine, Rosemarie. *The Women of Afghanistan Under the Taliban*. Jefferson, 2002, www.worldcat.org.
- Stuhr, Rebecca. *A Thousand Splendid Suns: Summary and Resistance*. Penn Libraries. University of Pennsylvania, 08 Jan 2011.