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ENDURANCE OF RESILIENCE AND THE TEMPO OF ANIMUS DEPICTED IN KHALED
HOSSEINI'S "A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS"

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ABSTRACT

The dominant portrayals of Afghan women in the Western media have shown them as passive victims of war violence and political repression. Along the same line the rhetorical vision of Afghan women determined within the novel conveyed the women's passivity within the context of Afghanistan. Khalid Hosseini, in his novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, depicts how society sees women as property as opposed to a treasure. The author exposed the way of Afghan women who were punished for speaking out, scolded for the slightest mistakes, and simply for being a woman. The study puts light on the oppression and discrimination suffered by many women under the Taliban rule for the crime of being born a woman.

Keywords: Discrimination, Passivity, Taliban, Violence, Repression.

The roles of women have been witnessed in literature for ages, but until recently, the majority of published writers were men, and the depiction of women in literature was biased. Much has to be said about the fact that in the ancient world literacy was strictly limited and that the majority of those who could write were men. However, the contribution of women in oral folklore is not to be underestimated. Many writers now try to bring the predicaments of women through their work.

Khalid Hosseini is one such writer. In his book "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*" he wrote about women oppression in Afghanistan. Many women in Afghanistan experience some form of abuse. The World Health Organization in 2015 reported that 90% of women in Afghanistan had experienced at least one form of domestic violence. Violence against women is widely tolerated by the community, and widely practiced in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) investigated 5,575 cases of violent crimes against women, noting that most cases go unreported due to traditional practices, stigmatization and fear of the consequences for the victims. A UNAMA 2009 report states that women participating in public life face threats, harassment and attack. In extreme cases, some have been killed for holding jobs that are seen to disrespect traditional practices.

The oppression as depicted by Hosseini is not particular to Afghanistan only, in fact it is common across various nations and cultures although the most stringent form of subjugation of women folk is a norm in religion dominated countries. Books such as 'My Feudal Lord', 'The Pakistani Bride', (Sidhwa, 2008) 'The Swallows of Kabul'(Khadra, 2005). and 'In the Land of Invisible Women'(Ahmad, 2008) to name a few, help us explore the

lives of women harrowed by religion, culture, tradition and men. All these novels are based upon real-life incidents where we see women subjected to verbal and physical abuse.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American novelist, physician, activist, humanitarian and UNHCR goodwill ambassador. He has published three novels, most notably his 2003 debut *The Kite Runner*, all of which are at least partially set in Afghanistan and feature an Afghan as the protagonist. Following the success of *The Kite Runner*, which was the fourth most challenged book in 2017, he retired from medicine to write full-time. Hosseini's work is uplifting, enlightening and universal. The author's love for his characters and for his country is palpable.

Hosseini has remarked that he regards "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*" as a "mother daughter story" in contrast to *The Kite Runner*, which he considers a "father-son story". It continues some of the themes used in his previous work, such as the familial aspects, but focuses primarily on female characters and their roles in Afghan society. It became a number one New York Times bestseller for fifteen weeks following its release in 2007.

When asked what led him to write a novel centered on two Afghan women, Hosseini responded:

"I had been entertaining the idea of writing a story of Afghan women for some time after I'd finished writing *The Kite Runner*. That first novel was a male-dominated story. All the major characters, except perhaps for Amir's wife Soraya, were men. There was a whole facet of Afghan society which I hadn't touched on in *The Kite Runner*, an entire landscape that I felt was fertile with story ideas...In the spring of 2003, I went to Kabul, and I recall seeing these burqa-clad women sitting at street corners, with four, five, six children, begging for change. I remember watching them walking in pairs up the street, trailed by their children in ragged clothes, and wondering how life had brought them to that point...I spoke to many of those women in Kabul. Their life stories were truly heart-breaking...When I began writing "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*", I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over. Though no one woman that I met in Kabul inspired either Laila or Mariam, their voices, faces, and their incredible stories of survival were always with me, and a good part of my inspiration for this novel came from their collective spirit."

From the Soviet occupation to the Taliban rule and the reconstruction of the Taliban – *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a comforting story against the unstable events of the last thirty years in Afghanistan - the human words of this country's violence, fear, hope and faith.

The title of the book comes from a line in the Josephine Davis translation of the poem

"Kabul", [10] by the 17th-century Iranian poet Saib Tabrizi:

"Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eye
Through the bazaars, caravans of

Egypt pass
One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs
And *A Thousand Splendid Suns* that hide behind her walls"

Hosseini revealed that it is harder to write "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*" in some ways than his first novel, *Kite Runner*. Because, when he wrote *Kite Runner*, "No one was waiting for that." He found his second novel to be more "ambitious" than the first, because of its large number of characters, including the dual focus of Mariam and Laila, and a multi-generational period.

Afghanistan, officially the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is a landlocked country at the crossroads of Central and South Asia. It is a land that has undergone so much destruction. Women are increasingly exposed to violence in this part of the world. Because of their vulnerable position in its society, the Afghan women have endured a tough existence throughout the years and massive question mark hangs over the fate of Afghan women and their rights:

They made me invisible, shrouded and non-being

A shadow, no existence, made silent and unseeing

Denied of freedom, confined to my cage

Tell me how to handle my anger and my rage.(Zieba Shorish-Shamley)

The rights of women in Afghanistan have been different throughout history. According to the 1964 Constitution, women achieved official equality. However, these rights were taken away during the 1990s civil war by various interim regimes such as the Taliban: It's like having a flower, or a rose. You water it and keep it at home for yourself, to look at it and smell it. It [a woman] is not supposed to be taken out of the house to be smelled."

(Syed Ghaisuddin, Taliban Minister of Education, when asked why women needed to be confined at home.)

Women have suffered greatly in Afghanistan's 40-years of war, and they long for peace. After the fall of the Taliban government, they fought hard for equality and made great strides. Today there are women ministers, governors, judges, police and soldiers, and Afghanistan's parliament has a higher percentage of women than before.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a narrative by Khalid Hosseini which portrays the predicament of women in patriarchal and war inflicted Afghan scenario. The women in this novel appear to be struggling. The prolonged conditions and the conflict in Afghanistan has greatly affected human life and caused much suffering and destruction for the country. Children and women are always the most vulnerable in any conflict due to their weakest position in society. In the novel, this is reflected in the words of Babi who despondently observes, "Women have always had it hard in this country". Hosseini has stated in an interview with the journalist Andrea Sachs published online on the TIME website:

"I was finishing up *The Kite Runner*, which had turned out to be a novel about men — the lives of men, fatherhood, brotherhood, and so on. Even as I was finishing the editing of that book, I had decided that I had to write a second book and address the issues pertaining to women [. . .] When I began writing this novel, all those voices came back and I think the two main female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were kind of inspired by my collective sense of what women in Afghanistan went through, particularly since the withdrawal of the Soviets and the breakout of anarchy and extremism and criminality."

This novel concentrates more on the female characters in terms of their roles within Afghan society. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini specifically depicts Afghan women's lives through the two female protagonists, Mariam and Laila, in order to show the influence of war and extremism which have been devastating to the people of Afghanistan.

At the beginning of the novel, Mariam is portrayed as the Harami, meaning "an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to be the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance".

Mariam did not have a choice because her options are very restricted. She was dragged to marrying Rashid and Like the majority of Afghan women, and was a victim of domestic abuse from him. Despite her plea her wedding was planned. She is forced to accept the engagement with a man who is thirty years older than she is. This situation shows how the dominant group or upper class people such as Jalil and Rasheed can control women like Mariam because they are considered powerless and inferior in the society. At the Nikkah, Mulla, without acknowledging Mariam's consent, said, "All that is left now is to sign the contract". Rasheed is concerned about sexual exploitation in society and its moral codes for women. He urges Mariam to wear the burqa and avoid strangers and even their family and friends. Mariam is not accustomed to wearing the burqa, and it is suffocating for her. But she could not say No to Rashid when he said her "You'll get used to it". Mariam experiences men's restriction of women. Her body is restricted through the dress code. Later, he gives similar instructions to his second wife Laila. In giving strict instructions to his wives, Rashid falsely pretends to protect their "honour" while engaging in boundless cruelty, regular abuse and beating. After Mariam rightfully protests against his second marriage, Rasheed openly boasts of the practice of polygamy prevalent in the society when he tells her, "Don't be so dramatic. It's a common thing and you know it. I have friends who have two, three,

four wives.” Rasheed’s hypocrisy is revealed when Mariam finds nude magazines lying hidden in his closet. At this, Mariam wonders about the existing double standards prevalent in the society.

When the Taliban took power in 1996, women in Afghanistan were deprived of education, employment, entertainment, and visiting places of public interest. They were significantly reduced to being more dependent on their male counterparts. It can be said that the religious teachings are possibly misinterpreted by the Taliban, resulting in strengthening the oppressive practices on women in Afghanistan. Afghan women, as a consequence, suffered and struggled for their lives during the rule of the Taliban. In the novel, during

Mariam’s trial for killing Rasheed to save Laila and her children with her motherly instinct, a young Taliban tells her, “I wonder [...] God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think we can Western doctors and their science have proven this. This is why we require only one male witness but two female ones”

Rasheed married Laila despite Mariam’s disagreement. Laila was a girl who was under their care after she lost both her parents in a bomb attack. Mariam and Laila are expected to adhere to the Afghan cultural belief about the perfect wife. That is, a perfect wife is treated as the property of her husband. Rasheed, as a consequence, can control Mariam and Laila at every moment and impose his ideas on them. In Laila's case, forced marriage completely robs her of her freedom. That is, forced marriage becomes the beginning of Laila's tough life. For example, Rashid does not allow her to continue her education. This gives Laila no hope of an income and better financial and social status in her future life. Therefore, men completely subjugate women as a result of forced marriage. Under Taliban rule, Laila is not even allowed to go out unless she is accompanied by a mahram or a guardian, or Rashid goes with her.

In a strong patriarchal society like Afghanistan, it is such a common phenomenon that women are considered powerless and subjugated and patriarchal ideologies have strongly influenced how they treat women and make them feel inferior to men. In “*A Thousand Splendid Suns*”, Mariam and Laila are mostly portrayed as victims of gender inequality, and they always are forced to adopt to unjust behaviour. Unlike Maryam and her mother Nana, who accept gender discrimination, Laila is a female protagonist who fights against gender inequality in a patriarchal Afghan society. Laila uses her education as a tool against gender inequality. Maryam's and Laila's story shows how Afghan women are struggling to live with dignity in a country that has suffered decades of war and resource scarcity. It also highlights how women are stepping in to help each other.

The dominant portrayals of Afghan women in the Western media have shown them as passive victims of war, violence and political repression. Along the same line the rhetorical vision of Afghan determined within the novel conveyed the women’s passivity within the context of Afghanistan.

In light of analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, one can conclude that the long conflict in Afghanistan adversely affects its women and patriarchal oppression. As a result, they suffered endless pain and suffering which, in Hosseini’s own words, “has been matched by very few groups in recent world history”. This pain and suffering were cast in their voicelessness. Through his narrative, Hosseini endeavours to provide voice to Afghan women by bringing their suffering to the

In the culture and ways of Afghanistan, a woman faces physical and emotional pressure to survive. Khalid Hosseini allows us to see in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* that the strength and resistance they gain from the adverse circumstances that world. Mariam and Laila faces will benefit them and help them move forward.

Set in Afghanistan from the 1960s to the 1990s, spanning from Soviet occupation to the Taliban control, following the lives of two women in their marriages and in their war-torn country. Expecting domestic abuse, graphic war descriptions and a main theme of oppression in Afghan women, this book shows the situations Afghan women had to go through.

There is a lot of information about oppressed women in Afghanistan in the international media, development reports and academic literature. Hungry widows, underage girls forced into marriage, high

maternal mortality rate, rape, murder, adultery, kidnapping, domestic abuse, self-abuse, loss of education, burning of girls' schools, restricted mobility, and forcing to Wear the burqa has been documented many times in word and image, and Afghan women have become the unified victims of a world of male dominant society.

When Afghan women take action to escape, they are again victimized. Women who run away from home can be jailed, rape victims can be punished for adultery or killed for compromising family honour. At best, they can seek refuge in a shelter, but that too is better than a prison because it does not get them out easily. In the book, Mariam and Laila are forced to marry Rasheed, who forced them to wear a burqa even before it was enforced law under the Taliban rule. Then he gets worse and abuses them.

During a visit to Afghanistan in 2003, Hosseini said he had heard "many stories about what happened to women, the tragedies and hardships they endured the gender-based violence they experienced, the discrimination they were subjected to during their active life in the Taliban, and the restriction of their movement, their legal and social rights and their political rights." This prompted him to write a novel focusing on two Afghan women. Women who wanted an education were forced to attend underground schools, where they and their teachers would face the death penalty if caught. Male doctors were not allowed to treat them except with a male chaperone, which left the diseases untreated. They were publicly beaten and executed for violating Taliban laws. The Taliban allowed and encouraged the marriage of girls under the age of 16.

Washington Post writer Jonathan Yardley suggests that "the central theme of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the place of women in Afghan society", pointing to a passage in which Mariam's mother states, "Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always, You remember that, Mariam".

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