

“UNVEILING THE VEIL: THE PLIGHT OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF KHALED HOSSEINI”

Dr. Anagha Arvind Joshi,

Lecture in English,

Science and Humanities department,

Government Polytechnic Hingoli

Abstract: Women in Afghanistan have been impacted differently due to changing situations. Women have suffered much in last few decades due to political instability, male chauvinistic attitude, religious stereotypes and continuous wars. The writings from Afghanistan led to the world being made more aware of the sufferings of women in a male-dominated and conflict-ridden society. Khaled Hosseini has emerged as a very important voice for the Afghan women. Anyone reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns* will see that. They wrote many novels related to Afghanistan and its society. Also, he focused on the Afghan women and their loss of identity, dignity, and freedom. His writing vividly represents conditions in Afghanistan and the trauma faced by its women. The works of Khaled Hosseini have been examined in terms of their representation of women. Seeing how Afghan women are suffering and living under oppression has been especially helpful. Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* gives us a glimpse of the destruction caused due to the Afghan war.

Hosseini's depicting the voices of Afghan women brings important issues of gender equality, human rights and social justice to the forefront of global consciousness.

Keywords: Afghan Women, Khaled Hosseini, Gender Inequality, Feminism, Patriarchy, Domestic Violence, Resilience, Human Rights, Afghan Literature

INTRODUCTION:

In my long association with literature, I have read many stories, essays and poems which carried a strong social message. It is our birth right to live and every human has a right to it. Nonetheless, several forces are taking away this right from people. Writers make use of socially relevant literature to highlight those evils and injustices. Others work toward ensuring they regain their fundamental rights. Literature have become an instrument for exposing social evils.



Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist, played an important role in educating the world about Afghanistan. The novels he has written depict the reality of his country that most people do not know about. An analysis of the character A Thousand Splendid Suns shows the important themes. In the same way, kite runner character analysis shows us true intent of Hosseini through his literature. The kite runner depicts the characters and characters about experience in Afghanistan they give us and idea about it. We will not talk about some of the important themes from his novels.

Through his writings, the author weaves tales of family, identity, sacrifice, suffering, and hope. The literary analysis of The Kite Runner highlights Hosseini's enormous focus on women, which is likely one of the most important points. The Afghan women get a lot of attention in the author's novels. In other words, the kite runner does not confine the woman to the background of family or social problems. It portrays women's tussle through social evinces in a man-dominated milieu. Moreover, they showcase the ability to withstand everything.

One such writer is Khaled Hosseini, whose novel A Thousand Splendid Suns showcases this in detail. The plot revolves around the lives of a maid and her boss in Kabul. Through the stories of Mariam and Laila, Hosseini demonstrates.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Khaled Hosseini has helped the world understand women from Afghanistan who have been socially, culturally and politically oppressed. Hosseini narrative novels have sparked many debates in academia around gender inequality, patriarchy, feminism, identity and resistance. The following review presents a summary of important literary and theoretical texts that

provide invaluable background to the predicament of the Afghan women in Khaled Hosseini's novels. Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) provides a poignant insight into the life of the Afghan society before and after the political downfall. Although the novel's chief theme is friendship, betrayal and redemption, it makes a reference to the secondary status of women in a male-dominant culture. Sanaubar and Soraya are notable female characters in *The Kite runner*. In this patriarchal society, men and women are often subjected to blame. Soraya's social restriction from the music club illustrates the power that honour and reputation have in an Afghan culture. In a similar way, Sanaubar is judged as a woman for leaving her husband.

The author reveals that because of women's gender, they suffer, while men cannot suffer for doing the same things. More specifically, they're both "fallen" according to the criteria of honour.

The story of Mariam and Laila explores issues such as forced marriage, domestic violence, lack of education, war and Taliban rule, and their case makes them face the brunt of it all. The novel depicts the suffering of great oppression but through incredible talent and strength, they survive it. Hosseini emphasizes the importance of women's solidarity and friendship, illustrating how those become survival tactics and a weapon of resistance against male power. Moreover, Hosseini delves deeper into the themes of familial bonds, personal identity, and the agony of mankind in *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013).

Simone de Beauvoir's classic feminist text *The Second Sex*, which was published in 2011, contributes significantly to the understanding of female oppression. In regards to men, women have always been the "Other," the opposite but inferior sex throughout the syllabus of world history.

There are several intersecting stories in the novel. Nevertheless, many women characters are displaced or emotionally estranged and socially referred to as non-characters.

Ultimately, the ending presents women as complex human beings shaped by their choices and circumstances. The impact of sacrifice, resilience, and identity is clear in *And the Mountains Echoed*, just like Hosseini's other books.

Beauvoir's essential idea is that gender identity is social. Gender refers to the social process whereby an individual is assigned a distinct identity from her biological sex. Being powerful, it explains the non-existence of a universal female role in history and the subordination of women in societies.

Mariam and Laila's experiences reflect that de Beauvoir's point that women are denied autonomy and that women are the inessential members of society. In her book *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, published in 2000, Bell Hooks discusses the need for a feminist movement working towards equality, justice, and freedom from oppression. Hooks says that patriarchy shapes the lives of different women differently depending on their social and cultural context. The women in Hosseini's novels must be examined through her optics. All the women characters are shown to be tremendously courageous in opposing and fighting against their oppression within a system of unequal power relations. In *Feminism Without Borders* (2003), Chandra Talpade Mohanty states that development came to be associated with feminization and generalized images are produced in the name of third world/developing nations. Her understanding of transnational feminism shows the differences between women's struggles in different contexts and draws attention to the importance of and the difference made by the history and culture of any context when writing about women of that context. Her works will be beneficial in analysing Hosseini's novel as it will help to look beyond the victimhood of Afghan women and shine light on their agency, strength and their lived experiences.

Elaine Showalter is often regarded as a feminist critic; her *A Literature of Their Own* (1999) deals with the representation of women and the rise of women's literary traditions. Showalter argues that women's writing and representation be studied as parallel and independent phenomena. Critical feminist literary theory provides useful tools for the analysis of the representation and voicing of female characters in Hosseini's fiction where the contemporary West's dominant narratives often silence them. In his study on women, war and identity in contemporary Afghan literature, Ahmad (2018) explores how war determines the shaping of female identity and experience. After two decades of war, women are now more vulnerable to violence, displacement, poverty and social exclusion, the study finds. According to Ahmad, the contemporary Afghan literature presents its women as both victims of conflict as well as agents of survival. This perspective is very apt in the context of Hosseini's representation of his women characters who continue to survive and resist. The analysis of Khaled Hosseini's fictional works specifically focuses on women representation as being representative of the social reality of the conditions of Afghan women. As per Rahimi (2020) the analysis appears to be apt. He focuses on gender discrimination, denial of educational opportunity, domestic violence, and social exclusion.

According to Rahimi, Hosseini's female characters breach these stereotypes as they show resilience, resolve and emotional strength despite their miserable condition. Hussain conducted a 2019 study on female resistance to patriarchy in Khaled Hosseini. The paper demonstrates that the existing patriarchal power structure suppresses women and ensures unequal gender relations.

Nonetheless, Hussain (2019) argues Hosseini portrays women who fight for themselves actively. Through various forms of resistance, sacrifice and solidarity, Mariam and Laila resist their oppressors and confront the system. Many of the woman also subvert the established heterosexual and patriarchal power with their sexual prowess.

In general, the writings above show that Khaled Hosseini's work would prove a valuable resource for feminist and humanitarian criticism. Most importantly, these studies reveal that Afghan women are not mere victims of social injustice in the works of Hosseini. They possess the strength of courage and hope. The existing literature would provide a strong basis to analyze how Hosseini makes people confront gender inequality and yet also celebrates these stronger women.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

Gender Discrimination and Patriarchal Structures

Gender discrimination is a recurrent theme in Hosseini's novels. The women of Afghanistan are shown to live in a society that assigns more power and privilege to the males. Women are expected to perform the traditional roles of wife and mother and be obedient to the male members of the family.

Mariam gets discrimination from her childhood in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Society ostracises the illegitimate child and makes her pay a terrible price for her parentage. Her life reflects how society is wronging women by not granting them equal status. Like, Laila has many restrictions, even though she is a clever girl who wants to study.

The author very artistically shows that women are denied a choice to live life on their own terms as everything is done by the men of the society to restrict them. Through female characters, he shows the damage done to the women through the rituals and customs that the patriarchy empowers.

Forced Marriage and Domestic Violence

A forced marriage can be described as when one or both the parties are getting married without their free will or consent. Throughout the novel, Mariam is forced into marriage with Rasheed, a local shoemaker whom she has not chosen. She does not have a role in the choice. Actually, it can be claimed that Rasheed's wife is the downfall of her life. The forced marriage practice described in the passage can be seen in Hosseini's novels.

Domestic violence is another theme we see in Hosseini's novels.

Rasheed hits Mariam and Laila multiple times for different reasons specifically when the man does not get what he wants.

The doctor clearly indicates the beating instructions that he receives. The man incited violence against his wives/he did not incite the provocation, according to the doctor. The storyline vividly showcases the effects of domestic violence.

Education as a Tool of Empowerment

Throughout the text, education is placed in centre stage by Hosseini. Laila's father believes that first she must learn as much as possible. His assistance in her brainpower is quite rare in our society.

Despite the chaos of war and political turmoil in her country, Laila is eager and adamant to learn and educate herself. Education is the hope for a better and more progressive future. Education enables Laila to gain confidence and enhance her critical thinking ability and acquire.



According to Hosseini education may be one of the most powerful devices that empower women. It is capable of reversing a great deal of conditioning. Education of girls and women should be equal, he emphasises.

Female Solidarity and Resistance

Solidarity among women is a key element in Hosseini's novels. Mariam and Laila may not have gotten off on the right foot, yet they develop a deep friendship with each other. They support each other through everything. The argument takes place as the new family adjusts to their altered situation.

The protagonist can often be inferior to the other sides to the characters. Mariam and Laila are no different. Through interface we learn that a person is not what their exterior show.

Their friendship is significant, though. Both seek freedom from Rasheed's abusive manner. Essentially, death grants independence from their grasp.

Motherhood, Sacrifice, and Resilience

Motherhood is a theme that is very powerful. People will go to extraordinary lengths to sacrifice material possessions and even their lives to save their children.

One of the most impactful moments in contemporary literature is Mariam's final act. Laila and her family are protected after Mariam makes a decision to take the blame for a crime. This act changes Mariam from a victim to a very brave and heroic character according to the reader.

In the book, the author states that resilience isn't the absence of suffering. It's suffering, endurance, and still maintaining your hope and humanity. Hence, all the female characters of Hosseini have shown.

War and Its Impact on Women

Hosseini's novels are set in Afghanistan's decades of War. War significantly worsens the difficulties faced by women. During wars, the families get separated. Schools are damaged. More economic hardship.

Women often take care of families when things are not stable. They are severely limited in their access to resources and protection. In several kinds of war, Hosseini illustrates the lives which have been affected because of political decisions. Moreover, he pays special attention to the lifestyles of women and children.

Writer Khaled Hosseini shows the impact of war through the personal perspective rather than the political. He presents the victims of war as real human beings.

CONCLUSIONS:

Khaled Hosseini's presentation of his female characters in his novels has portrayed real-life events in the lives of Afghan women. The mistreatment of women is highlighted through Mariam and Laila's experiences like gender bias, forced marriages, domestic abuse, lack of education and impact of war. Similarly, he further indicates the determination of women who keep going and never give up.

Hosseini talks about women who are not only victims but also people who resist, sacrifice and transform their lives. The female portrayal in his works echoes the message of hope and dignity in oppression.

In conclusion, Hosseini's novels are an important interventionist literature to deal with women's issues and social justice. The subaltern social movements have truly empowered and raised awareness about the marginalised people.

FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

Researchers may analyze the social representation of women in other fiction texts by Afghan writers in the future. A future study can be conducted on Afghan Women's Status in Literary Text after recent Developments in Afghanistan. The future researchers may examine how gender, religion, culture, and politics combine to constitute women's Identities through an Integrative Study. A comparative Feminist Study of South Asian, Middle Eastern and Afghan Literary Text will be possible in the Future.

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