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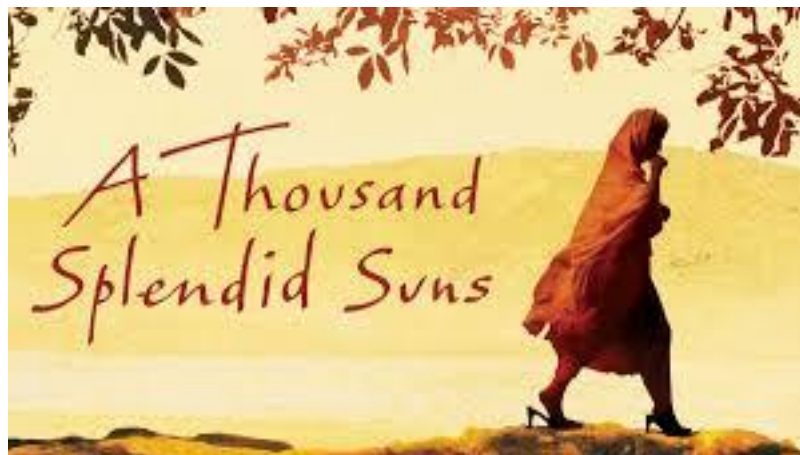
Gender Discrimination in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the kinds of gender discrimination faced by women in A Thousand Splendid Suns, and to analyse women's attitudes towards gender discrimination in the novel. The main source of the paper is the novel entitled A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini, which was published in 2008. Different kinds of gender discrimination are faced by the female characters. They are violence, subordination, gender stereotypes and lastly marginalization. The three female characters show different attitudes. Nana shows her acceptance by showing no resistance towards Jalil the oppressor, but showing her anger towards her daughter Mariam and she becomes self-destructive. Meanwhile, Mariam and Laila face their problems by working in sisterhood to escape from Kabul, fighting Rasheed the oppressor, and using education to end discrimination.

Keywords: self-destructive, female, gender discrimination, marginalization



The equality between women and men has been achieved through many years of struggles. Feminist literary criticism has started to question the differences between women, including how race, class, ethnicity, and age intersect with gender in a patriarchal society. In a strong patriarchal society, one who use violent means are not only the relatives of women such as husband and other family members, but also others. In the novel, the Taliban, who at that time takes over the city from Mujahideen, undoubtedly strike all women who break the rules they have made. They beat Laila who travels alone to visit her daughter in an orphanage without having a mahram or male relative. Below is the quotation which shows that a young

Talib violates Laila. One day, a young Talib beat Laila with a radio antenna. When he was done, he gave a final whack to the back of her neck and said, "I see you again, I'll beat you until your mother's milk leaks out of your bones." (313) The above quotation shows how horrible it is living in a country in which all men have the power and authorities to conduct violence against women when they do not follow the laws made by men.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, there are seven kinds of women's subordination, i.e. women are alienated in a remote place, are forced to get married, sons are preferred to daughters, women are prohibited to dress up the way they like, women's mobility is limited, and women are treated unfair in polygamy. In Afghanistan polygamy is legally accepted. If a married man wants to marry for the second time he should get the consent of his first wife. Jalil marries Laila without the consent of Mariam. It clearly shows that law and order of a State stands with men only. Mariam and Laila are forced to get married to Jalil.

In a patriarchal society, men give more importance to their esteem. To protect their names in order to meet their own ideas of social expectations, men will do whatever they want without considering women's feelings and lives. In the novel, after knowing that Nana is pregnant with his illegitimate child, Jalil tries his best to keep his reputation to avoid any shame to his names. He takes action by casting Nana out of his house. He considers Nana as unimportant so that he does not care about Nana's life in an alienated place. Moreover, Nana's father also leaves Nana for the sake of his reputation. Jalil alienates Nana for the sake of his reputation when he actually should take responsibility for what he has done to her. Jalil rapes Nana, abandons her, and do not admits his daughter as his legal child. Later on, Nana and her child, Mariam, are alienated in a clearing which is far from Herat. Jalil knows that a remote place far from his home is good for his reputation because no one will know that he has done something wrong. In that remote place, Jalil builds her a house that Nana calls a rat hole in Afghan language. The way Jalil abandons Nana and Mariam shows that men consider only their reputation. Jalil and Nana's father didn't consider that Nana's life and reputation are as important as theirs.

In the novel, son preference is seen clearly in the conversation between Mariam and her neighbour. A neighbour suggests Mariam, who is pregnant for the first time that having a son is better than a daughter. It is because a boy can carry the family name throughout his lifetime while a girl takes her husband's family name after her marriage. In a patriarchal society having a son means that a family can sustain their identity. Rasheed is very clear

about his preference for a boy. He insists that the unborn baby in Mariam's belly is a boy so that he is genuinely happy about the pregnancy. He is only willing to give a name to the unborn baby. Unfortunately, Mariam suffers a miscarriage, which then happens seven times. Rasheed finally puts his hope on Laila. However, Laila still cannot please him because she gives him a baby girl named Aziza as her first child. Later on, the situation changes after she gives birth to Zalmai. Zalmai's presence makes it clearer that Rasheed's heart will only give a space for a son. He shows different treatment for both Aziza and Zalmai. He shares bed with Zalmai while Aziza has to sleep with Mariam. He also buys new clothes and many toys even when he is in bankruptcy. Rasheed's special treatment for Zalmai shows how valueless a girl is. If a son is valued as a blessing, a girl is only seen as a burden.

Patriarchal system has taken women's rights, restricting women to get liberation and choices they want. Men manage every detail of women's lives including the way women dress up. In the novel, Rasheed insists the importance of honour and pride for a woman by hiding her bodies from other men's eyes except their husbands. According to him, covering their bodies with burqa, a garment that covers the whole female body including face, is the way women keep their honour and pride. Actually, it has been a long debate over burqa throughout time. A ban on the wearing of the burqa will be a violation of right of those women, who wish to wear it, as the forcing of the veil on those women, who do not wish to wear it. Some women may not even mind to wear it. Yet, Burqa turns to be a symbol of the oppression and subjugation of women when it annoys women. As in the novel, Mariam and Laila feel distressed to wear burqa because inside it, they feel uncomfortable. It limits their move and gives them difficulties when they are eating. It is also heavy, strange and unnerving, for they lose their visions. Maria's discomfort when wearing burqa is also felt by Laila. Although Laila admits that she feels somehow comfort in the anonymity, what she feels is actually desperation. She is desperate because her lofty aspirations and her beautiful dreams are dashed and crushed.

Unconsciously, under the burqa she becomes someone else. She feels weird to the limitation of the sight and her feet stumble over the hem. She also feels uncomfortable to walk under the burqa. Despite the sufferings that she has to go through, Rasheed forces her to wear it. It is because in Rasheed's standpoint, a husband has a right to control her wife with regards to her activities and even ideas. A good wife should keep her honour and pride for her husband by wearing burqa. About thirty years later, it becomes a legal command from the

Taliban, who occupies the city, that all women in the country should wear burqa when they are outside their homes. They also forbid women to wear makeup, jewellery, charming clothes, and painting their nails. The Taliban also includes the punishment if women break the rule. They will beat women for not wearing burqa and cut their fingers for painting their nails. The rule limits women from expressing themselves and being as beautiful as they want. Under the burqa, women are nothing but the walking corpses with dark colour. They are neither women nor human.

Patriarchal society considers men as superior to women and men have the right to control women's lives. Men restricts women and treats them very badly. Women should play like a puppet at the whim of men. Women are not given freedom in a patriarchal society. They were denied the fundamental rights. The ill-treatment shown towards women is high in the Middle East countries compared to western countries. Women can only come out of this problem by fighting for equality. Women should be aware about their rights and they should strive to get education.

Reference

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009.