

Endurance, Resistance and Incessant Quest for Identity: A Feminist Study of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns****Samina Akhtar**

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This paper explores the unyielding endeavor of the female characters to seek identity as delineated in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The study unveils women's plight in the politically-turbulent Afghan society; examines how Afghan women tolerated the predicament ratified upon them, and the resistance they imparted to get an inimitable identity. It believed that women can play an undeniable role in the progress of a country, however, if they are deprived of their rights, there would be ultimate feminism insurgence and emancipation against the injustices. Through his writings, Hosseini tried to give voice and moral encouragement to Afghan women by constructing empowered, resistant, rebellious, and strong female characters. This study traces how Hosseini interrogates the patriarchal hierarchies that encompass the identity of women and analysis the political and social bigotries directed towards the female protagonists, who exhibit socio-political activism throughout their distressing journey. The conclusion holds that in a patriarchal system, women cannot cope with the domination and intolerance of the society, however, women's friendship and unification prove resistance as a sanctuary for them.

Keywords: *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, feminism, patriarchy, endurance, resistance, identity.

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist, has tried to voice the voiceless and support the subaltern class particularly Afghan women in his works. Though, he never claimed that he is a feminist, his writings show the ideas of the feminist approach along with feminist sisterhood that seeks the solidarity of women to overthrow the patriarchy and political and religious victimization of women. His novels are a great accomplishment of a feminist cause because not only do they display the marginalization and subjugation of women but also counteract by bringing forward characters who resist marginalization and fight for feminism. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is important because of its high readership, its rendition in various languages, and its encouraging prepublication appraisal. For example, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is endorsed with approving prepublication assessment from Weekly Publishers (2007), Library Journal (2007) and Booklist. It also accomplishes 2nd number on Amazon.com's chart buster list before it was made public. The novel under study continues to change the world's perception about the women of Afghanistan. It turns out to be momentous across the world and important to be meticulously

studied. It is a novel of contrast, a metropolitan life with enlightening, “educational and professional prospects for Laila in Kabul, and a rustic life of strict traditions and wretched deprivation for Mariam growing up outside the city of Heart” (Stuhr, 2011:, p. 53). Both the endearing women are born into very dissimilar circumstances but are married off to the same tyrant and patriarch man, Rasheed. They become very affectionate friends out of their communal predicament ratified upon them by their despotic husband and the patriarchal social setup.

Mariam, an undesirable offspring of a wealthy entrepreneur and an inferior and deficient woman in economic, social and political hierarchies. She is presented as a subaltern. Being a woman of a lower social class Mariam is deprived of the right to get an education to exercise some control over her life. After knowing Mariam’s wish to attend school, her mother bitterly remarks that the sense in schooling a girl like her is just as “shining a spittoon” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17). Since her childhood, Mariam is enforced to live a subservient life without choices, and was taught by her mother that “There is only one skill a woman like you and me need in life, and they don’t teach it in school... And it’s this: *tahamul*. Endure” (Hosseini, 2007: 17). Her mother prepares her to tolerate the patriarchal psyche. Mariam endures, subsist and tolerate the unbearable plight until she realized her strength and self-respect, finally she “stripped of her womanliness and social rights because of her status as a ‘harami’ child” and becomes a “class-breaking revolutionary woman who surmounts “illegitimate beginnings” to get a “legitimate end” (Akhtar et al., 2017, p. 97).

Laila, on the other hand, is the daughter of a revolutionary man Bhabi, who doesn’t believe in gender inequalities. He has a very optimistic perspective about women and strongly advocates the role of women in the progress of the country. He advises Laila to pursue education and contribute to the reconstruction of his war-devastated country, who will need her as much as its men when this terrifying war is over because a “society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 3). In her childhood, she enjoys the freedom that was once possible for the women of Afghanistan. Hosseini presented her as the conspicuous force of radical feminism, she rejects to accept the world of subjugation and stands firm to get her rights at any cost.

The country of Afghanistan is among the authoritative patriarchal societies that result in more constrained, exploited and humiliated conditions for Afghan women. The history of Afghanistan shows that the political turbulence in the country has been the root cause of most of the conflicts and riots in Afghanistan. The whole population of the nation is a victim to the upheaval that has taken place in the political facade. However, women swallow the brunt of all these. Men set the policies which are mainly based on gender that marginalized and subjugate the growth of the female sex. In the Book Browse interview, Khaled Hosseini writes that he hopes the reader will develop insight and feeling of compassion for Afghan women, “on whom the effects of war and extremism have been devastating. I hope this novel brings depth, nuance, and emotional subtext to the familiar image of the burqa-clad women walking down a dirty street” (Stuhr, 2011).

This study endeavors to explore the dilemma of female identity and the impact of social and cultural setup on identities and actions of the female characters. Furthermore, the social and political injustices that the Afghan women have to face because of the multiple invasions of their country; first the Soviets, then the Mujahedeen, followed by the Extremists and finally the recent American occupation are also explored. The researcher set some questions to study; firstly, to what extent does Hosseini’s literary work authentically represent the social realities of his native nation? Secondly, what are the social and political injustices that the Afghan women undergo? Thirdly, where and how women in Afghanistan find identity, happiness, and hope in their lives?

The study attempts to portray Mariam and Laila, as subaltern and plighted women who turned to become revolutionary feminists and focuses on how these women overcome their social differences and develop a strong familial bond that helps them achieve their identity. Furthermore, it focuses on the issues of sexism, human rights, and gender status in patriarchal Afghan society, and adopted feminist literary criticism which is an appropriate approach to comprehend the entire thought of feminism in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Ruthven considers Feminist literary criticism is a suitable approach used to reveal the subjugation of women because it truly helps in revealing the message of literary works, questioning the relationship and association between text, power, and sexuality discloses in literature. Feminist perspective concerns patriarchal social order and deals with various notions about gender, sex, femininity, masculinity, struggle, values identity, stereotypes, and change (Ruthven, 1984, pp. 23-25).

This study emphasizes women's social, economic and political rights, the problems of gender equity, identity and patriarchal ideology in Afghan social setup, where women have been facing gender discrimination in its worst form since ages. Kazamiyan states that women's position was destabilized during the reign of Soviet occupation and in the subsequent regime; in fact, the desecration of Afghan women's civil rights is considered to be nastiest in the early 1990s and are further battered with the succession of the Taliban into power in 1996 (Kazamiyan, 2012, p. 4). Male supremacy and tyranny over women in Afghanistan is the main concern that relates this narrative to the feminist facet. Nicolas Hill maintains that the appealing account of the female's subjugation and their resilient connection and bonding with each other offers an inimitable prospect into the tumultuous cauldron of Afghanistan patriarchal world, and the subjugated and low-standard status of women under the reign of the Soviet Union followed by the Mujahedeen coup and later the oppressive administration of the Taliban. The daily violence in the patriarchal society is only a dull reflection that reveals the persecution that ensues behind the closed doors of Mariam and Laila's lives, who determine to resist against the tyrant subjugator, but the retribution comes at a high price (Hill, 2015, p. 1).

The title of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is satirical. Like a perfect piece of literature, the novel with its theme of cruelty and oppression against women is a casement into an extremist male-dominated society that thinks little of justice, human rights, and freedom, in favor of hierarchy, authority, and oppression. Rasheed is the representative of this chaotic world. What he fails to understand is that when the tormenter, whether it is individual or the state, goes too far in its ruthlessness, the subjugated can rise up against the dominant to guard the ones they care for even endangering their own life (Null et al., 2008: 125-126).

Physical Violence and the Female level of Resistance

Donna Coker a feminist scholar explicates the connection between physical acts of violence and the structure of political, social, economic and interpersonal controls that seize a woman's potential to decide the course of her life. Coker explains that physical violence and beating women may be practiced as a personal violation, but it is "an act facilitated and made possible by societal gender inequalities". She asserts that the batterer does not, indeed could not, act alone (qtd. in Schneider, 2000, p. 12). This can be clearly seen in the lives of Mariam and Laila, who decided to escape the patriarchal terrorism, and take their destiny in their own hands, however, they were badly failed in the daring attempt, caught on the way and sent home back in a police car watched over by a Mujahedeen soldier.

Hosseini describes in detail the violence done to both the women by their brutal husband, Rasheed. Nandita Kaushal in her critique "Global Perspective of Domestic Violence against

Women” asserts that violence against women continues throughout a woman’s existence, and start before birth in the form of female infanticide or sex-selective abortion, in societies where a son is desired and considered as heir. Ntozake Shange asserts that “every three minutes a woman is beaten, every five minutes a woman is raped, every ten minutes a little girl is molested” (qt. in Idris, 2009, p. 22), this statement clearly depicts the picture of cruelty, oppression, and violence against women. Due to the second class status in the patriarchal Afghan society women have always been suffered, oppressed, dominated and marginalized.

Feminists criticize the system of patriarchy to be one of the important reasons for violence and oppression against women. Jackie Stacey asserts that a patriarchal world refers to “the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination” (Stacey, 1993: 53). Regenia Gagnier squabbles in her critique “The Functions of Class at the Present Time: Including Taste, or Sex and Class as Culture” (2000) that human beings are categorized as male or female, and socialized into being men or women. She argues that “gender is a role, masculine or feminine, or a relationship of inequality between things that might not on the surface have to do with masculine or feminine” (Gagnier, 2000, p. 37).

John Locke’s *The Treatise of Government* (1690), asserted that every person has natural rights to life, freedom, and ownership which no government can reject. The term Feminist in Afghanistan is more suspected because of its strong connection with Western notions of sex, gender, culture, and social disruption. Being a patriarchal society where religion is manipulated to gain personal political, social and traditional benefits, Afghanistan is not that easygoing place for the feminists such as many female activists including Spojami Zaryab, Maryam Mehboob, and Rangina Hamidi and men like Khaled Hosseini agree with many feminist principles such as protection of human rights, gender equality, women awakening and empowerment and equal opportunities of social and economic growth for all citizens of Afghanistan. However, they are afraid to openly claim themselves as feminist as it cause severe criticism from religious and social circles along with political marginalization. Therefore, for such feminist activists in a place like Afghanistan, the most crucial undertaking is to spotlight the issues associated with the lives of women irrespective of showing their attachment with any ideology advocated by the Western philosophers. In so doing, Hosseini has supported the cause of women and given a feminist outlook and insight into his fiction. For instance, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the situation of women in Afghanistan, who are treated as objects. Rasheed, a domestically violent husband explains to his wife Laila “a woman’s face is her husband’s business only” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 48). She strives hard against her treatment as a male-owned object, but being a part of patriarchal Afghan society she is victimized from all sides.

Through his experience and observance, Hosseini has aided the voice of repressed, marginalized and subaltern women in their struggle to make a much-needed change to support their struggle for social, economic, religious and political existence in Afghanistan. The critical works of Lata Mani (1990), Chandra Mohanty (1991), Uma Narayan (1997), and Gayatri Spivak (1999) have validated Hosseini’s initiative to highlight Afghan women’s insurgence and emancipation that challenge the discursive construction of the third world women’s lives in western accounts.

Endurance, Resistance and the incessant quest for Identity

This section examines the actions of Mariam and Laila, as they join together against the patriarchal society that has taken away their rights to live and love according to their own will, and to move free together once again as women under Kabul’s “thousand splendid suns” (Hosseini,

2007, p. 172). Hosseini's protagonist, Mariam is the product of Jalil's sexual dalliance. She fancies her father as her ideal and wants to make her life better by attending school. This longing in her is encouraged by her spiritual father Mullah Faizullah but was bitterly crushed by her distrustful mother: "What the sense schooling a girl like you?" the mother asks. "It's like shining a spittoon" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17). Soon after her mother's suicide, she was compelled to marry Rasheed, the embodiment of the patriarchal male. Who treated her as anything but a human being? Society's emphasis on male domination is obvious from Rasheed's treatment of Mariam's abortions. His mood shifts drastically: "With each disappointment (six other miscarriages), Rasheed had grown more remote and resentful. Now nothing she did pleased him" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 98). He forces Mariam to chew a "handful of a pebble" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 104) which displays his disgust in her inability to give birth to his heir. Ann Jones affirms in Kabul in winter, that in Afghanistan shocking 95 percent of women undergo some form of aggression, oppression, and humiliation.

On the other hand, Laila is born in the period of the Communists and has the advantage of schooling due to her father, who advocates women's rights. He administers impartiality between the sexes and tells Laila: "Women have always had it hard in this country, Laila, but they're probably freer now, under the communists, and have more rights than they ever had before..." (Hosseini, 2007, p. 121). Mary Wollstonecraft, a revolutionary feminist and women's rights advocate attached great value to female education. In her work, *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792) Wollstonecraft said that women are human beings and should not be deprived of their individual rights, privilege, and opportunities, including the rights to education, right of earnings and also property ownership. She asserts further that there is no vital difference between men and women in terms of their 'potential for self-development' and in their 'capacity for a reason', adding that education must encourage "independence of thought" (Wollstonecraft, 1792, pp. 26-48).

Unfortunately, when she was only 14, communism begins collapsing in Kabul. The fundamentalist parties fight to get political control and over throne Soviet government. After losing her parents in the war she ended up to marry Rasheed, who over the years has become more violent, angrier, and brutal. Consequently, she developed a familial bond with Mariam, triumph over their social inconsistencies, unified to get freedom from Rasheed's tyranny.

Rasheed has fundamental control over his wives throughout their lives until they decide to deter his 'patriarchal terrorism.' They have to tolerate his shifting moods, his displeasure with their cooking and cleaning, his abusive attitude, insult and handling as if they are useless objects not as human beings. In the chauvinist society, women are treated as men's possessions. For example, Rasheed, very impudently explained Laila that "A woman's face is her husband's business only" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 48). This is a clear example of a male disconcerting a female that he is the owner and possessor. Rahimi states: "The position of women in Afghanistan has traditionally been inferior to that of men. This position has varied according to age, socio-cultural norms, and ethnicity. Afghan women, even until the beginning of the 20th century were the slaves of their father, husband, father-in-law, and the elder brother. Her most valued characteristic was silence and obedience (Rahimi, 1991, p. 6).

Like Mariam, Laila too is the source of fulfilling his objective needs, something Rasheed will drag out and utilize when desired. Rasheed utilizes them like a vehicle, a house or cannon. Feminist writers of different associations and disciplines picture gender role and patriarchal-established standards that tell women how they have to behave, and in this way thwart them from developing a sense of identity and self. Sarah Gamble says in *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism* (1999) that matrimony is an "enduring institution...a form of

compulsory heterosexuality, and the means by which the oppression of women is perpetuated sexually, economically, and socially” (Gamble, 1999, p. 269). Simone De Beauvoir, a famous existentialist philosopher insisted in her book, *The Second Sex* (1949), that women should have the choice to become mothers or not and make a special world for themselves. She argues that men and women have never shared the world of equality, women have always been considered as “man’s dependent, if not his slave”, and till date woman is “heavily handicapped. Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as men and frequently it is much to her disadvantage” (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 10).

Hafizullah Emadi describes the stereotyped representation of women in Afghan society that women’s status is considered so inferior that Afghan men used the word ‘women’ to insult their opponents and rivals as weak and subservient (Emadi 1991, p. 225). The pathetic situation of Afghan women can be realized from the fact that they can’t even protest against social injustices just because of the family honor, as they will be subjected to ‘honor killing’ since their slight disobedience of the patriarchal system causes disgrace to their father, brother or husband’s social prestige. Subhash Chandra Singh in “Gender Violence: Some Contextual Issues” (2005) asserts: “Women’s sexuality is just one another important area of women’s subordination and oppression. Women are obliged to provide sexual services to their men according to their needs and desires.” (Singh, 2005, p. 23). Mariam’s subjection to sexual violence stops only when Rasheed marries Laila for then Laila becomes the object of his unkind acts for the sexually sadistic behavior persists all the same.

Subhash Chandra Singh further asserts: “After marriage, a wife is regarded as the sexual servant of her husband rather than an autonomous self-determining person” (Singh, 2005, p. 24). Singh’s statements are true for characters like Mariam and Laila in the fictional description. Rasheed occasionally compares his wives to vehicles. Mariam was the ragged, slow and old car and Laila the latest and exciting one. When Laila gets pregnant Rasheed becomes tender and loving but his mood shifts when she gives birth to a daughter. He becomes verbally violent and aggressive towards Laila and her daughter: “Sometimes, I swear, sometimes I want to put that thing in the box and let her float down Kabul River. Like Baby Moses” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 212). He never calls his daughter by the name “Aziza, the Cherished One” instead termed her the baby, or, “when he was really exasperated, that thing” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 212).

He desperately wanted a male heir to carry on his family name and due to disappointment in his patriarchal desires, he treats Aziza’s birth as boorishly as he treated Mariam’s miscarriages. The female sex is desensitized as a deprived “other.” According to Simone de Beauvoir: “A man performs chastity upon a woman” while seeks pleasure and satisfaction for himself. She argues:

“There is a double demand which condemns a woman to duplicity; he wants the woman to be his and to remain foreign to him. He fancies her as at once a servant, an enchantress but in public, he admits only the first of these desires, the other is a demand which he conceals in the secrecy of his own heart and flesh” (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 221).

For Rasheed, the women just become objects that he directs. Countless times they are crashed against the wall and crushed and injured just for doing a simple mistake. Muzumdar says that the emphasis on women as subjugated, and the marginalized group is recent progress in the world and people has recognized that “despite all their rights being violated women have been suffering in silence.” (Muzumdar, 1998, p. 47).

Mariam and Laila tolerate Rasheed’s spiteful demeanour in a different way. Mariam grows up considering herself a futile ‘harami’ unacceptable to society. She, therefore, accepts her lower status and surrenders herself to the life she is enforced to live and continues to tolerate the

domination and oppression ratified upon her. She never thinks to resist Rasheed's abusing behaviour, even if he gets agitated with her serving of food, she regrets it as her mistake. The hostile husband treated her like rubbish and she offers him all in return. This insolent relationship causes Mariam to live in distress. It was never easy for her to tolerate his insults and ridicule, to bear his scorn. He would walk past her like "she was nothing but a house cat" (Hosseini, 2007: 89). After spending many years of an unhappy marriage Mariam realized "how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid." (Hosseini, 2007, p. 89). Rasheed humiliates her in every possible way, calling her bad names, abuses her, and disgrace her physically and sexually. Mariam's life can be analogs for other Afghan women whose lives in constant terror of their husbands, who never admire anything regarding their women. Rasheed always disapproves and complains that she has given him in this marriage. Only "Bad food, and nothing else" (Hosseini, 2007: 94). Much like the same in the novel, *The Pakistani Bride*, (2000) Bapsi Sidhwa movingly portrays the oppression of female sex in the patriarchal social order as,

"Women the world over, through the ages, asked to be murdered, raped, exploited, enslaved, to get importunately impregnated, beaten up, bullied and disinherited. It was an immutable Law of nature." (Sidhwa, 2000, p. 226).

Mariam and her 'lot' have to endure miseries and distress everyday in order to survive in the culture. She undergoes and breathes in this routine for a long time until her acquaintance with Laila, who adjusts all for her. Being a radical feminist Laila eagerly wants to restore her power and place in the social setup. She was very much aware of the fact that it will be extremely hard to compete with a persecutor like Rasheed in the patriarchal social setup, still, she is resolute enough to create her inspiration and able to present herself as a role model for other women in the country to follow and respect. Laila succeeds in molding herself into a New Woman persona.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it is the mutual horror of Rasheed's irrational brutality that unites Mariam and Laila. Both the women can understand the pain that Rasheed's actions are causing to the other. When the unkind husband tells Mariam about the pregnancy of his other wife, only Laila understands Mariam's state of mind. "Laila was there when Rasheed sprang the news on Mariam in a highly dramatic voice. Laila had never before witnessed such cheerful cruelty." (Hosseini, 2007, p. 205). Suzanne Prescott and Carolyn Letko in "Battered Women: A Social Psychological Perspective" (1977) point out:

"While violence in marriage could be expected to have few positive effects, most women (84%) could pinpoint at least one positive outcome. They reported that violence had helped them to become more independent. Many indicated that they were able to establish relationships by reaching out or seeking others." (Prescott et al., 1977, pp. 84-85).

Laila wields to save Mariam from Rasheed's resentment several occasions and this helps to get them to connect in an affectionate bonding: "Violence, ironically, creates harmony among otherwise warring elements" (Toch, 1969, p. 33). Mariam has never experienced in her life such a caring attitude as no one has ever stood up for her before. The strain between Mariam and Laila thus ends; Mariam becomes grateful to Laila for shielding her. This is the beginning of the creation of a common identity between the two women against a common rival. Then, the baby, Aziza takes ahead the affiliation. Mariam starts caring for the baby and makes her clothes. On this occasion, Laila understands Mariam in a new way: "it was not an adversary's face Laila saw but a face of grievances unspoken, burdens gone unprotested, and a destiny submitted to and, endured" (Hosseini, 2007: 223). The ultimate bond of affection, trust and friendship are being formed over the tea in the environment of more violence "As gunfire cracked in the hills" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 224). The bond is preserved when Rasheed, screams out for Laila to quiet the baby: "A look passed

between Laila and, Mariam, an unguarded, knowing look. And in this fleeting, wordless exchange with Mariam, Laila knew that they were not enemies any longer.” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 224). Rasheed becomes hysterical after knowing about Tariq’s visits, and contemplates Mariam guilty. He decided to hurt and punish them both. He hits and assaults them horribly and it is evident from his intents that he wishes to kill them.

Rasheed chokes Laila, and in this precarious time, Mariam resolves to resist and raises the shovel high and turned its sharp edge vertical, and hits the tyrant with full force. As she hits she realized that “this was the first time that she was deciding the course of her own life.” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 311). Mariam’s ultimate hit against violent Rasheed signifies that she has endured a lot. It was the right time to resist the cruel norms of the chauvinist society and Rasheed’s ferocity. Her immense step signifies that she refuses to accept the control of the society. Death appears like the most reliable decision to get free from the perilous battering and oppressive command of the Taliban, or an invasive husband. With the daring act of killing Rasheed, she digs herself out of the class domination. Marcuse characterized Mariam’s inescapable killing act as a certain degree of ‘radical social change’. Marcuse says that freedom is the ultimate destiny and environment of a person who is “no longer adaptable to the competitive performances required for well-being under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life.” (Marcuse, 1989, p. 236).

Through Mariam’s character, Hosseini exemplifies those women, who struggle hard to be conventional and abide by the roles their society and culture specified for them, but it is painfully compelled to take the matters into their own hands. Laila and Mariam are freed from Rasheed’s control after his death. Mariam saves their lives. It is the development of this amalgamated individuality that keeps them in hard times. Laila on Mariam’s request leaves her native country along with Tariq and her children; however, Mariam resolves to stay and face the consequences of her daring act. She yields her life for her dear ones and accepts her patriarchal ending. She is hanged to death by the Taliban. As she pledges a crime against patriarchy, she has to undergo a patriarchal ending. Mariam meditates:

“She thought of her entry into this world, the harami child of a lowly villager, an unintended thing, a pitiable, regrettable accident ... And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back.” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 329).

The death of Mariam exemplifies the freedom of soul and body from the oppression that continues for decades in the insubstantial patriarchal state where there cannot be freed until the cruelty ends, one escapes or dies. Sheila Rowbotham, a socialist feminist says that once the prevailing state is destroyed the formerly oppressed state must acknowledge the fundamental social change it has implemented. In order to unveil the real identity, the socialist must let go of the oppressor’s account of stress and “create their own way of seeing” (Rowbotham, 1973, p. 281). Through a feminist standpoint, one can assess Mariam’s daring action of the killing of Rasheed as an act in which she takes herself out of the gender and class domination that plights her whole life. Mariam and Laila find strength and support in one another although their lives cross with distressing terrible results. The unbreakable bond grants them the courage that helps them to hold on to resist and fight for their survival. Richard McCarty says in his analysis of the female character in the novel that each of the females makes a choice that set her life in her control. These women are not simply restricted by outer forces. Neither of them allows herself to be a victim. McCarty pays tribute to the author that he could write about women in such a compelling way. By standing up against gender discrimination and their class oppression, Laila and Mariam

concomitantly yelled a loud “NO!” to the patriarchal setup that keeps them away from contented life.

It is because Mariam’s memories encourage Laila that she returns to her mother country to be a part of the restoration of her homeland where circumstances are improving for all and “women returning to work” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 345). Her going back is a symbolic victory for all the women offended by the violence in her country. The women of Afghanistan are victims with heart breaking stories and yet they are also symbols of hope. Mariam’s surrender pervades into Laila’s aim and the renovation of the country. Laila understands that “every Afghan story is marked by death and loss and unimaginable grief. And yet she sees that people find a way to survive, to go on” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 350). Regardless of all the violence Mariam and Laila endure; their faith in righteousness, however, remains unchanged. And it is this strong faith that brings Laila back to Kabul in order to take part in the innovation of the devastated country. She considers her father’s words: “You can be anything you want, Laila, he says. I know this about you. And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you.” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 345).

In spite of the bleakness and the pessimism in her life, Laila has the potency of an ‘activist’ soul. Her restoration of the orphanage in Kabul and also her pregnancy signifies the beginning of a new life in her native land, Afghanistan. “Laila spots flowers potted in the empty shells of old Mujahedeen rockets, rockets flowers, Kabuli’s call them” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 398). The rockets flowers suggest the beginning of new life in Afghanistan. A life that is full of hope, peace, and harmony.

Both Laila and Mariam represent the women who are part between the traditional values and also recognizing their individual identity turned off from society and responsibility. Their daring acts, sacrifices, and rediscovery of freedom fit with Selmon’s theory that explains levels of resistance through the restoration of the portrayal of women. Mariam losses her dear life to bring peace, independence, and objectivity in other womens’ lives. At the time of her execution, “As she closes her eyes, it was not regret any longer but a sensation of abundant peace that washed over her” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 370). She feels contented to turn into a “person of consequence,” having cherished people in her life (Hosseini, 2007, p. 329). Rebbeca Stuhr states in her critique that Mariam embraced death “so that Laila and the children, together with Tariq, can find a sanctuary where they will thrive in peace and security.” (Stuhr, 2011, p. 62).

Mariam ‘endures’ as she is believed to, and through her endurance and resistance proves that: “One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 172). The endeavors Mariam and Laila precede are diverse as they have different dispositions and upbringing. Being the female citizens of the country, where patriarchy is pertinent it is difficult for Mariam and Laila to cope with the domination and intolerance of the society. They have to endure the oppression and gender discrimination with fortitude, but it does not mean that they yield to it. Moreover, it shows their strength and the power to tolerate against the coercion. In the beginning, Mariam is inclined to be powerless and tolerant, while, Laila is apt to combat. Her decision to leave Rasheed’s house along with Mariam and her children confirms that she employs radical feminine struggle against the subjugation and to seek identity. Although she does not succeed in her daring attempt, it depicts her resolution to decide her personal life. In the end, Mariam uses her strength to fight against her oppressor husband Rasheed and detriment her resistance as sanctuary for Laila and Aziza.

Conclusion

Hosseini's fiction presents the factual picture of Afghanistan based on a framework of gender inequity and patriarchal system. The obedient and resistant Afghan women highlight the issues that have restricted women's prospect and hope for a significant and suggestive life, and their emancipation and insurgency suggests that unless the denunciation of female subjugation and gender inequity along with the promotion of gender solidarity, the betterment of the third world males and women will remain a dream. The characters truly represent the patriarchal Afghan society, it is the women folk who suffer and endure alone, and who are deprived of their right to get education or job. They have no freedom of expression, lack affection and are compelled to repress their essential needs and desires.

The novel perfectly mirrors the philosophy of life and identity of Afghan women. Hosseini depicts the brunt of the patriarchal culture on the lives of Afghan women. He exposes the miseries, loneliness, and aggravation that have been imposed on Afghan women by their social, ethical, ideological, political, and conventional setup and consciously provides his female characters a chance to rehabilitate and challenge persistent oppression. The study suggests the policy of self-empowerment of women through unification and confluence. Women's friendship is one of the great resistance forces against the officious and oppressive male-dominated society. Mariam and Laila develop such a friendly relationship with each other that later on enable them to break the authorial voice. The ceaseless quest for self-identity and resistance against oppression and subjugation determine active feminism on their part and subsequently proved that the subaltern can speak even at the risk of their own peril.

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