

**A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS: THE VOICE CRYING  
IN THE WILDERNESS**

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**Abstract**

*Today's world is Post-Modern world, where everyone is equal to other, but in some countries there are lawless treatments to the most people. The present paper tries to focus on the situation of the women in South-Asian country, Afghan, which presented by Khaled Hosseini in his second novel A Thousand Splendid Suns. Through this novel, author highlights terrible situations of female in Muslim ruled countries, also shows the superiority of the Laws (Sharia Laws). Hosseini shows the harsh reality of Muslim women where women are avoided, from taking basic education, from using the basic rights of freedom. It is a great satire on democracy.*

**Key words:** *Hosseini, Sharia Law, Men-Women relation, Education, Basic rights, Freedom and Muslim Countries.*

## A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS: THE VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

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Khaled Hosseini is a very famous author of 'The Kite Runner' (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013). Through, all these novels he delineated the harsh reality of the contemporary world. In the present novel he shows how women are inferior to men. The whole novel move around Afghan society and their people. In Afghan there is very rigid law for the women.

Women, Blacks or slaves, Untouchables (lower caste), workers and poor people are the voice less in the world. Because, whenever these people want or do something they are treated as inferior. The paper aims to focus on the situations of women with special focus on Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). The novel vividly describes the inequality of men and women in foreign countries especially Muslim countries like Afganistan and shows that oppression of women still exists today in modern society though the world is thinking of liberalisms and equality of everyone. He also demonstrates the strength of women even when they are put in the most unfortunate of circumstances. The novel explores the societal expectations of women. The assertion is that Hosseini allegorically portrays the treatment of women in juxtaposition to the modern state of Afghanistan which under the rule of Taliban. Women are displayed through the Islamic cultural lens of females. While this emotion filled novel may be disagreeable to those who operate under Islamic Sharia laws- is the moral code and religious law of Islam. Following passage shows the reality of women in Afghan or most of Muslim countries:

While in power in Afghanistan, the Taliban became notorious internationally for their treatment of women... Afaghan women were forced to wear the burqa at all times in public, because,

according to one Taliban spokesman, "the face of a woman is a source of corruption" for men not related to them. In a systematic segregation sometimes referred to as gender apartheid, women were not allowed to work, they were not allowed to be educated after the age of eight, and until then were permitted only to study the Quran. Women seeking an education were forced to attend underground schools, where they and their teachers risked execution if caught. They were not allowed to be treated by male doctors unless accompanied by a male chaperone which led to illnesses remaining untreated. They faced public flogging and execution for violations of the Taliban's laws. The Taliban allowed and in some cases encouraged marriage for girls under the age of 16. Amnesty International reported that 80% of Afghan marriages were considered to be arranged by force. (Wikipedia)

The role of women in the world socio-cultural context has always been one of the subjugation, insecurity, segregation, alienation and discrimination experienced by women is expressed through different literature in different languages. Novel is one of these genres which have provided a strong platform to the novelist to reveal their sensibilities. Present novel takes place from back in the 1970's up into the 21st century. Throughout the novel women are treated as voice less or other with little to no respect and have no rights of behavior, speaking, working, learning etc. Men are far superior to women in Afghan society. In the novel Hosseini present, where men have great privileges there women do not and there are separate laws that only women have to follow. Despite all these hardships of women, Mariam and Laila are able to overcome these struggles and live their lives in a satisfactory, successful way.

Honor is very important in Afghanistan. Hence, Jalil despite the fact he has an affair and a baby named Mariam from Nana, he will not allow her to live in his house because it would tarnish his reputation having slept with her out of marriage. Mariam was brought up in isolation, living in a small *kolba* with her mother, Nana. The only others in her life were her father, Jalil. Her mother always calls her harami or bastard. When she become elder understand

that a harami was an unwanted thing; that she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance" (Hosseini : 5). She felt worthless because Nana constantly made statement by stating "There is nothing out there for her. Nothing but rejection and heartbreak" (Hosseini : 14) when Mullah Faizullah told Nana that Mariam wanted to go to school. Nana makes Mariam believe that she would always be seen as a filthy harami and would go nowhere in life. Her fate was already decided for her in her mother's and society's terms. Nana says Mariam needs, "Only one skill. And it's this: tahamul. Endure"( Hosseini : 17)." Mariam was raised with this idea—that she was of no value and would never live a normal life or find happiness—and it carried on into her future.

When Nana hangs herself, Mariam has nowhere to turn to, her own father will not even let her stay with him for fear that people would start to talk. Instead, he marries his own fifteen year old daughter off to some forty-five year old man. He has no respect or value for his own daughter. She is forced to stay home to cook and clean, and when he gets home she has to satisfy him sexually. Rasheed forces her to wear a burqa, or a long robe with a hood and veil. He fished a sky blue burqa from the bag. The yards of pleated cloth spilled over his knees when he lifted it. He rolled up the burqa, looked at Mariam. The following passage just shows very traditional and ridiculous custom in Afghanistan's people through Rasheed:

"I have customers, Mariam, men, who bring their wives to my shop. The women come uncovered. They talk to me directly, look me in the eye without shame. They wear makeup and skirts that show their knees. Sometimes they even put their feet in front of me, the women do, for measurements, and their husbands stand there and watch. They allow it. They think nothing of a stranger touching their wives' bare feet! They think they're being modern men, intellectuals, on account of their education, I suppose. They don't see that they're spoiling their

own nang and namoos, their honor and pride.” (Hosseini: 47)

Once, again, it is an oppression of women, though, Men are allowed to walk around dressed in whatever they desire. Women have to wear those burqas which cover their entire bodies, so that no other man could see her besides her husband.

Laila, who is also treated as inferior or oppressed, is another woman character in the novel. She has a drastically different upbringing than Mariam. She grows up mostly without a mother. Although Laila and Mariam have extremely different childhoods, they are thrown into a similar situation in their future. Laila is brought into Rasheed and Mariam’s life through tragic circumstances. Due to the violent war taking place all around them, Laila’s house is struck by a bomb. Her parents are both death, and she is left alone with severe injuries. Mariam and Rasheed nurse Laila back to health, and Laila agrees to marry Rasheed. She does so because she believes that Tariq, who is her former lover, is dead and she happens to be bearing his child, an unforgiveable sin that she must conceal. She then undergoes the same treatment from Rasheed that Mariam had to tolerate. Rasheed forces her to stay at home and wear a burqa, and her every move is watched by Mariam. With the addition of Laila, Rasheed now has the control of two wives, and in his eyes it must remain this way.

While snooping around Rasheed’s room, Mariam finds an adult magazine that contradicts Rasheed’s beliefs. “Why did Rasheed insist that she cover when he thought nothing of looking at the private areas of other men’s wives and sisters?” (Hosseini: 54). Because Rasheed is a man though, it does not matter how contradictory he is, he can be as unreasonable as he wants. Not only women’s rights suppressed, but the laws are different for men and women, especially under the rule of the Taliban as:

Attention women:

You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside,

you must be accompanied by a mahram, a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home. You will not, under any circumstances, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten.

Cosmetics are forbidden.

Jewelry is forbidden.

You will not wear charming clothes.

You will not speak unless spoken to.

You will not make eye contact with men.

You will not laugh in public. If you do, you will be beaten.

You will not paint your nails. If you do, you will lose a finger.

Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately.

Women are forbidden from working.

If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death.

Listen. Listen well. Obey. Allah-u-akbar. (Hosseini: 166)

Women were not allowed to do anything. Most of the laws were totally ridiculous such as not being allowed to laugh, not allowed to make eye contact with men, and not allowed to speak until spoken to. These rights were not taken from the men, just the women. These laws were put into effect to put men above women. And the fact that women could not go to school or work is unbelievable. This meant that a woman could not live without a man. Without him, she could not make money and even if she had money, she could not leave the house to get anything without being beaten. Women could not escape the beating. The Taliban would beat them whenever they did something wrong, like when Laila walked the streets alone, and their husbands were allowed to beat them without any consequence. Rasheed beat Laila and Mariam whenever they did anything wrong. These women are so completely oppressed, that they cannot do anything about it, nothing is in their favor.

However, when times are hardest Laila and Mariam combine their inner strengths and are able to defeat Rasheed. When it seems as though Rasheed is

going to choke Laila to death, Mariam musters up all she has and takes a shovel to his head. And so Mariam raised the shovel high, raised it as high as she could, arching it so it touched the small of her back. She turned it so the sharp edge was vertical, and, as she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time that she was deciding the course of her own life. And, with that, Mariam brought down the shovel. This time, “she gave it everything she had”. (Hosseini: 211) This victory over Rasheed symbolizes that when struggles are at their peak, women will find the strength to stand up to the problem and defeat it. When oppression holds them back they will face it with all their might. In Mariam’s last moments of life, she realizes that the label of *harami* that Nana had given her was not meant to stay with her, it had been washed away and replaced with someone who would have lived life with love and friendship. She came into the world believing she meant nothing, and changed this assumption and left the world as something. She endured because she was supposed to, and once she endured too much, she acted upon this. “One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs, or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls” (Hosseini : 172).

In this novel, Hosseini does a splendid job of providing vivid descriptions of what modern life of women in Afghanistan and the inferior situations they have fought through. He provides examples of the differences between men and women’s rights and how the laws favor men. He suggests us that at the times of oppression, if women fought bravely, splendid suns were waiting for them. The novel presents, how is the situation of women, especially in the Muslim world, who are in search of identity even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century too.

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