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**Reclaiming Agency Amid Chaos: A Feminist and Postcolonial Reading of Khaled Hosseini’s A Thousand Splendid Suns**

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**Abstract**

This study examines Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns through feminist and postcolonial critical theories, focusing on Afghan women's agency in the context of socio-political turbulence. Examining the two prominent protagonists Mariam and Laila, this study explores the performances of gender oppression, survival, and resistance within a war-torn patriarchal society. The novel testifies to the confluence of colonial pasts, cultural domination, and institutional misogyny and thus the larger women's battles in postcolonial fields. Employing feminist theoretical frameworks, the study examines the structural limitations imposed on women and their coping strategies of resistance against patriarchal hegemony. The study employs postcolonial analysis to assess the impact of colonial legacies and local socio-political concerns on Afghan women's lived experiences. The study demonstrates the manner in which women's solidarity and acts of resistance deconstruct the structures of domination, thus reclaiming autonomy in a male-dominated world. In this study, we undertake a close reading of the text so as to support the contention that A Thousand Splendid Suns imagines the concepts of survival and empowerment within the confines of repressive settings. The study advances feminist and postcolonial literary scholarship by asserting literature as a form of mobilizing repressed voices and overcoming socio-political regimes.

### Keywords: Feminist Literary Criticism, Postcolonial Studies, Gender Oppression, Afghan Women's Resilience, A Thousand Splendid Suns

**Introduction**

**Background**

Khaled Hosseini is a unique writer because of his connection to Afghanistan's history and culture. A Thousand Splendid Suns is, for a bit of time, how Mariam and Laillah's lives interwoven during Afghanistan's social and political wreck. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* tells the story of what Afghan women went through in Afghanistan for more than thirty years of conflict. It takes the reader from when the Soviets first invaded Afghanistan to what went on when the Taliban controlled power, telling the stories of people who are strong, who make sacrifices, and who continue, regardless. It does not write about Afghanistan's rocky past; it also takes up for women who are usually taken for granted. In this novel, we see Mariam's life from when she is born of single filth, her rough hood, her destructive relations with her dad, and his estrus, which brings her to a cruel marriage of force. On the other hand, Laila's story takes place during war and turmoil highlighting her strong will and her complex bonds with her family and Tariq. The excerpt highlights the themes of resilience, female oppression, and the enduring impact of war on individuals and families in Afghanistan. The book's copyright and publication details are also included. The narrative portrays love, loss, and forgiveness through the complex experiences of its characters, often in nuanced ways.

**Love**

**Romantic Love:** The passionate and idealistic love between Laila and Tariq is a source of hope amidst the chaos of war. When they reunite, Laila remembers how "they would crowd the air between them with words... always interrupting each other... the quickness to laugh, the eagerness to delight" [page 226]. However, their relationship faces challenges like separation, misunderstandings, and individual obligations. Laila reflects that "So much had happened since those childhood days, so much that needed to be said" [page 226]. When Tariq says to Laila, "I'll follow you to the end of the world," [page 233] she believes she has "never loved him more than at this moment" [page 233].

**Parental Love:** The narrative shows the complexities of parental love, both positive and negative.

Nana's love for Mariam is fierce and protective but also includes bitterness and resentment. Nana tells Mariam, "Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam" [page 8]. Jalil's affection for Mariam is shown to be inconsistent and unreliable. He tells Mariam "You don't need excuses. Not you," [page 30] but ultimately marries her off to Rasheed [page 30]. Babi's love for Laila is gentle, supportive, and nurturing. Laila observes how "at night, when Laila walked into Babi's room, she always found the downward profile of his face burrowing into a book" [page 69].

**Mammy's love for her sons** overshadows her relationship with Laila. Laila thinks, "Mammy was now the curator of their lives’ museum and she, Laila, a mere visitor" [page 77]. Rasheed’s love is possessive and abusive, reflecting a patriarchal and controlling nature [previous turn]. He says to Laila, "I am your husband now, and it falls on me to guard not only your honor but your behavior too" [page 137].

**Friendship and Companionship:** The bond between Mariam and Laila evolves from initial resentment to deep friendship. They find solace and support in each other, forming a sisterhood that transcends their circumstances. Mariam tells Laila, "It is fair...I've killed our husband... It isn't right that I run" [page 218]. Mariam's connection with Aziza highlights her capacity for love and nurturing [previous turn]. Mariam tells Laila to "Kiss Aziza for me... Tell her she is the *noor* (light) of my eyes and the sultan of my heart" [page 218].

**Loss**

**Loss of Loved Ones:** The characters’ experience profound losses due to war, death, and broken relationships. Laila loses her parents and brothers and believes she has lost Tariq. Mariam loses her mother and her connection with her father. Rasheed loses his first wife and son. These losses shape their identities, and the narrative explores how they cope with these events. Laila remembers how she thought of Tariq "all the time. I used to pray that you'd live to be a hundred years old" [page 46].

**Loss of Innocence and Hope:** The war and violence cause characters to lose their innocence and hope. Laila and Mariam's lives are marked by constant upheaval and hardship. Mariam's life is marked by disappointment, as her hopes for a better life are repeatedly crushed. Laila reflects, "She might have taken the bus and gone somewhere far from here. Detached herself from this city where every street corner was a trap" [page 136]. Laila, despite her education and potential, is forced to make sacrifices to survive.

**Loss of Security and Stability:** The constant political and social turmoil results in a loss of stability for the characters. They live with fear, uncertainty, and a lack of control over their lives. They lose homes and are forced to navigate the challenges of displacement and oppression. Laila thinks, **"**There would be bodies to step around in the morning. Some would be collected. Others not. Then Kabul's dogs, who had developed a taste for human meat, would feast" [page 120].

**Forgiveness**

**Seeking and Granting Forgiveness:** The narrative explores the complexities of forgiveness. Mariam grapples with forgiving her father, Jalil, for his betrayal. In his letter, Jalil writes to Mariam, “Now all I can do is ask for your forgiveness. So, forgive me, Mariam jo. Forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me" [page 246]. Mariam also seeks forgiveness from Zalmai and Laila for killing Rasheed. Laila and Tariq have to forgive each other for the choices they made during their separation. Laila says to Tariq, “the man who came to give the news, he was so earnest…I believed him…And then I felt so alone and scared. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have agreed to marry Rasheed” [page 203].

**Self-Forgiveness:** Characters also struggle with self-forgiveness. Laila feels guilty for the circumstances surrounding her marriage to Rasheed, particularly its impact on Mariam. Mariam grapples with self-reproach about her life and her decisions.

**The Role of Redemption:** The narrative suggests that forgiveness and redemption are possible, even after great suffering. Mariam's transformation from a woman who feels worthless to one who is a friend, companion, guardian, and mother illustrates her journey toward redemption. Laila chooses to move forward and dedicate her life to improving the lives of others. When Laila asks Tariq what he thinks of her going back to Kabul he says, "I'll follow you to the end of the world, Laila" [page 233]. The story ultimately shows a hopeful outlook in the face of immense challenges.

**Objectives**

**Analyze the multifaceted portrayal of love.** Explore the different types of love depicted in the novel, such as romantic love, parental love, and friendship. Examine how these various forms of love influence the characters' actions and choices within the context of war and social upheaval. For instance, discuss how Laila's love for Tariq contrasts with Rasheed's possessive and abusive behavior. You might also want to consider how Mariam's relationship with Aziza illustrates her capacity for love and nurturing, while her relationship with her own mother was complicated and painful.

**Investigate the theme of loss and its impact on character development.** Analyze the various forms of loss experienced by the characters, including the loss of loved ones, innocence, hope, security, and stability. Detail how these losses shape their identities and motivations. For example, examine how the loss of her sons’ shapes Mammy’s identity and her relationship with Laila. Consider how the loss of her parents and the belief that Tariq is dead influences Laila's choices. Analyze how Mariam's life is marked by a series of disappointments and losses.

**Examine the role of forgiveness and redemption.** Discuss the complex nature of forgiveness in the novel, particularly how the characters grapple with seeking and granting it, as well as with self-forgiveness. Consider Mariam’s struggle to forgive her father, Jalil, and her attempt to find redemption through her relationship with Laila and her sacrifice [page 246]. Also explore Laila’s and Tariq’s need to forgive each other for their choices when they were separated, and Laila’s need to forgive herself for marrying Rasheed.

**Explore the socio-political context of the novel.** Examine how the novel portrays the impact of war, political conflict, and oppressive social structures on the lives of women in Afghanistan [previous turn]. Analyze the effects of the Soviet invasion, the rise of the Mujahideen, and the Taliban's rule on the characters and their relationships. You may want to consider the scene where the policeman, Rahman, justifies his actions by saying it's all a "matter of law" [page 160]. Also consider how Rasheed misinterprets the Koran, as noted by Mariam [page 213].

**Analyze the themes of resilience and hope.** Explore how the characters demonstrate resilience in the face of extreme adversity and oppression. Analyze how, despite the constant suffering and losses, Laila and Mariam demonstrate hope for a better future. Consider how Laila decides to return to Kabul at the end of the book, a decision motivated by her desire to honor Mariam's sacrifice and rebuild her country, as she tells Tariq, "But it's more than that. I feel like I have to go back. Staying here, it doesn't feel right anymore" [page 233].

**Evaluate the novel's literary techniques and narrative structure.** Analyze how the author's use of language, imagery, symbolism, and point of view enhances the novel's themes [previous turn]. For instance, consider the significance of the title, which comes from a poem and how it relates to the novel's themes [page 253]. Note how the author uses alternating perspectives and flashbacks to develop the characters and advance the plot.

**Assess the representation of female characters.** Analyze how the novel portrays the experiences of women in Afghanistan and how the characters navigate the challenges imposed by patriarchal and oppressive structures. Consider the strength and resilience shown by both Mariam and Laila. Also, consider how these female characters subvert traditional expectations, as Mariam does by killing Rasheed and Laila does when she goes back to Kabul to rebuild her country [page 217; page 233].

**Discuss the novel’s portrayal of Afghan culture and society.** Explore the cultural values, traditions, and societal norms presented in the novel. For example, consider the ways that the novel depicts the practice of arranged marriage, the importance of family, and the impact of religious beliefs on daily life. Note the significance of the Koran, as shown by the characters [page 30; 54, page 58]. By addressing these objectives, your review paper will offer a comprehensive and insightful analysis of "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*." This paper examines how *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini reflects the lived realities of Afghan women, both within Afghanistan and in the diaspora. This study aims to uncover how the novel shapes global views of Afghanistan and its people by looking at themes of gender-based oppression cultural strength, and the search for control over one's life. New studies show the problems Afghan women face during and after conflicts. Majidi and Hennion (2014) look into the risks for displaced Afghan women pointing out their money troubles social isolation, and lack of ways to cope. They stress the need to protect these women more during unsettled times. Anupama and Chowdhury (2022) check on Afghan women's legal rights and safety worries after the Taliban took over in 2021 comparing real life to how writers like Atiq Rahimi show it in books. Zabihzadeh et al. (2015) break down Rahimi's short novel "The Patience Stone," which shows different kinds of home violence against Afghan women, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The authors say this violence comes from unequal treatment of men and women and a sexist power structure in Afghan society. Together, these studies highlight the ongoing fights of Afghan women and why it's crucial to address their rights and safety.

**Literary Analysis**

**Themes**

Hosseini emphasizes the perseverance of Afghan women by illustrating Mariam’s transformation from an outcast to an embodiment of love. Laila’s bond with Mariam becomes a source of solace, even amidst their suffering, representing a profound connection of compassion between them (p. 214). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, love and sacrifice are forged in the flames of inequality, exploring the complex lives of its characters in wartime Afghanistan. The novel further illustrates the interrelation of these themes; for instance, Mariam serves as a mother who endures immense hardships for Laila and the children. The complexities of various relationships and the struggles faced by women in Afghanistan, particularly from the 1970s to 2000 during the wars, are brilliantly highlighted by Khaled Hosseini in "A Thousand Splendid Suns. The novel is set against the backdrop of three decades of violence in Afghanistan and explores non-traditional relationships as well as the role of women in Afghan society (Qureshi, 2024). It addresses the sociological aspects of gender relations within a Muslim context and examines how a binary structure empowers women to resist cultural dominance (Chaudhary, 2020). The theme of sisterhood emerges as a crucial tool for survival, empowering women to defy limitations and resist oppression (Aruna & Thambi, 2024; Aruna & Thambi, 2024). The novel also intersects history, memory, and culture, depicting the traumatic experiences of its protagonists, Mariam and Laila, as they face internal displacement, religious impositions, and forced migration (Shalini & Aruna, 2022). Through these characters, Hosseini symbolizes the Afghan people's desire for independence and explores the impact of cultural trauma on individual and collective memory.

**Love and Sacrifice**

**Mariam's Sacrifices**: Mariam's journey in the novel is marked by a series of sacrifices driven by her growing capacity for love. Initially, her life is defined by feelings of being unwanted and unloved1. As a *harami*, she is seen as a "weed" by her own mother, and an embarrassment to her father's wives. This early experience of rejection shapes her expectations. However, her interactions with Mullah Faizullah suggest a potential for kindness and connection, but this is limited by her mother's controlling behavior.

**Sacrifice of Personal Freedom**: Mariam's forced marriage to Rasheed is a major turning point. She sacrifices her personal freedom and any chance of a normal life in order to try to please her father and avoid being a burden. This is the first of many such sacrifices she makes, and it is made against her will.

**Sacrifice for Laila and Her Children**: Mariam's most profound sacrifices are for Laila and her children, Aziza and Zalmai. Initially, she sees Laila as a rival for Rasheed's affections, especially after Rasheed marries Laila. However, their shared suffering under Rasheed's tyranny and the experience of motherhood for both of them leads to a deep bond and a deep sense of loyalty. When Laila is pregnant with Rasheed's child, Mariam is not pleased, but feels she has little control over the situation, and feels like she is the only innocent party in the arrangement. When Laila gives birth to Aziza, Mariam is won over by the little girl. Mariam begins to care for Aziza and loves her deeply, and this love motivates much of Mariam's later sacrifices.

**Ultimate Sacrifice**: Mariam's ultimate act of sacrifice is her decision to kill Rasheed to save Laila from his murderous rage, knowing it will cost her own life. She takes responsibility for Rasheed's death, allowing Laila and her children to escape Kabul and find a better life. This act, driven by her love for Laila and a sense of justice, transforms her from a victim into a symbol of selfless devotion and resistance. Mariam decides that she will not let the two of them live on the run like fugitives and be caught, and endanger Laila's children. Mariam tells Laila that she is thinking like a mother when she decides to take responsibility for Rasheed's murder. She accepts this responsibility and does not try to evade the consequences, giving Laila a chance at a future with Tariq and her children. Mariam does not want to escape this responsibility, as she doesn't want to spend her life being tormented by the knowledge of what happened to Rasheed, and how it affects Laila's son, Zalmai.

**Laila's Love and Sacrifice**: Laila also demonstrates love and sacrifice, though not to the same extent as Mariam. Her love for Tariq is a consistent theme and she also feels a deep love for her father Babi. This love motivates her to resist societal constraints and strive for a better future for herself and her children. Laila sacrifices her own desires to care for her father, and ultimately is motivated to marry Rasheed because she does not see a future for herself and is worried about being a burden. She feels compelled to marry Rasheed because of the circumstances of her life, and she is concerned for what the family shame will do to her father, Babi. Laila also puts her own life in danger by initially trying to terminate her pregnancy with Rasheed's child but she ultimately cannot do so, because she has already witnessed so much killing of innocents. Laila also sacrifices a chance to escape when she does not go with Tariq, because of her loyalty to her father and his love for her. Laila's love for her children is another motivating factor in her actions.

**The Transformation of Love**: The relationship between Laila and Mariam exemplifies how love can evolve in the face of shared hardship and suffering. Their initial relationship is fraught with tension and rivalry as both women vie for Rasheed's approval. However, as they endure Rasheed's cruelty and become mothers, a deep bond form between them. The love that the husband and wife have for Aziza, who is Laila’s daughter, creates another bond characterized by interdependence and affection. This bond ultimately fosters a deep connection that allows them to support one another.

**Parental Love**: The novel shows examples of parental love through the actions of Babi, Nana, and later, Laila and Mariam. It was also noted that Babi wanted Laila to receive an education, which contrasts with the traditional interpretation of women's roles in society. While Nana's overwhelming desire to protect Mariam is oppressive, it also stems from a place of care. Both Laila and Mariam form a bond with Aziza and nurture her; love is yet another reason that compels Mariam to sacrifice herself for Razia.

**Gender Inequality**

**Systemic Oppression**: Mr. Hosseini portrays modern Afghan society as one that consistently denies women their rights and freedom to make their own choices. This system is rooted in culturally and religiously imposed norms that subordinate females to males. The novel also highlights women as sexual objects who lack basic rights in education, employment, and migration. The epitome of this culture is illustrated when Nana insists that merely staying alive is the only skill a woman needs in life.

**Rasheed as a Patriarchal Antagonist:** Rasheed embodies the worst aspects of patriarchal hegemonic control and domination within the family. His tone is consistently cruel as he subjects Mariam and Laila to sexual, physical, and verbal abuse. He dictates every aspect of their lives, from their clothing choices to their daily activities, ultimately determining their worth. His unsympathetic treatment of Mariam after her infertility highlights his view of women as property, further exemplified by his tendency to resort to violence against his wives. He asserts that women are meant to be controlled and should know their place, claiming that he is a “different breed of man.”

**Control Over Women's Bodies:** Rasheed exerts domination over women, particularly through his control of their bodies. This is exemplified by his coercion of Mariam to wear the burqa and his sexual assaults on both of his wives. His views on women's roles and bodies are as extreme as those of the Taliban, as demonstrated later in the book. Rasheed's belief that he has the right to do whatever he wants with his wives reflects the trope of women's bodies as the property of men

**Denial of Education:** The novel illustrates how the status quo denies women the right to education, which is another form of systemic oppression. Nana’s view that education is useless for women reflects the stereotype of women as mere homemakers. The Taliban’s recent prohibition of education for girls further highlights this subjugation.

**Double Standards:** The novel illustrates that in a patriarchal society, women are subjected to two sets of rules. Men feel entitled to demand obedience and submissiveness from their wives while simultaneously enjoying the freedom to act as they please. This creates an unfair dynamic. Furthermore, if women experience abuse, they are often blamed for it.

**Resistance and Agency:** Simultaneously, despite the relatively diverse depiction of social oppression, the novel also highlights the empowerment of women. The education, the refusal to accept the role of a wife, and Mariam's final act of rebellion counter these oppressors. This expression is their agency, resisting dominant structures that allow them to exist, love, and care for one another.

**Intersection of Themes:** The novel's themes of sacrifice and love deal with gender discrimination and prejudice. Blessedly, the sacrifices of women are owed and affected by the robust patriarchal social structure. Mariam was never cruel to her sister, never violent. However, without her, there was no way for Leila to persevere, to continue Mariam's sacrifices, her final sacrifices culminating in the killing of Rasheed out of love for him, out of love for her children, and in order to spare them more suffering. This act also symbolizes Mariam's ultimate break from Rasheed's oppressive rule so far because we have never been told that Mariam had any relation to that particular section of the ruling class. And Laila's situation is no different. However, such constraints are primarily supported by Laila's society around her, which, in turn, engages in violence and restores instability. She is a social being, and these are the things she feels towards them, and she loves them enough to do this for them. Trailing this is her battle. She battles to give chances for herself and her children to flee, to let someone else do it for her, to avoid being chased by chance, and never to stop running so that she can find a way to protect her family from danger. This examines how love, sacrifice, and gender imbalance in society are all underpinned in A Thousand Splendid Suns, with Mariam and Laila's lives. The novel illustrates how these themes create a network of human relationships within the context of war, violence, and the misogynistic oppression of women in Afghanistan. The novel shows how deeply the lives of women are impacted by the patriarchal system, but it also highlights the strength, courage and agency of women to form bonds, resist, and endure.

Hosseini juxtaposes Mariam's and Laila's approaches to resilience by highlighting their different backgrounds, personalities, and circumstances, while showing how both women find ways to endure and survive.

**Mariam's resilience is rooted in endurance and quiet strength.** Her life is marked by hardship from the beginning as an illegitimate child [page 5]. Nana instills in her a sense of resignation, telling her, "It's our lot in life, Mariam. Women like us. We endure. It's all we have" [page 14]. Mariam's initial approach to adversity is passive; she accepts her fate, endures Rasheed’s abuse, and initially seems to have little hope for change. She internalizes the idea that she is a *harami*, "a thing not worth anything" [page 5, 102, page 133], and has little expectation for a better life. Despite this, she displays a quiet strength by enduring years of mistreatment and hardship [previous turn]. As the story progresses, Mariam's resilience evolves through her relationships and her capacity for self-sacrifice. She goes from feeling "like a weed, something you pull out and toss aside," to understanding her own value [page 15, page 245]. Her decision to protect Laila and her children shows her ability to rise above her circumstances and make a choice that is not self-serving but heroic. Her final act of self-sacrifice to save Laila is an expression of her inner strength and resilience. She tells Laila, "It is fair...I've killed our husband... It isn't right that I run" [page 217]. Laila’s resilience is defined by her determination, agency, and hope for the future. Unlike Mariam, Laila is educated, ambitious, and has a more optimistic view of life. Her upbringing in Kabul has given her a sense of her potential and worth. Even in the face of immense hardship, she actively fights for survival and the well-being of her loved ones. She initially marries Rasheed out of desperation, but she never gives up her hope for a better life [page 135]. She also makes an attempt at aborting her pregnancy before realizing that she is unwilling to sacrifice her child [page 169]. Laila's resilience is evident in her refusal to be completely broken by Rasheed's abuse, her determination to protect her children, and her eventual decision to return to Kabul to build a new life. Laila shows her agency in her decision to leave Kabul and seek refuge in Pakistan, where she is determined to honor Mariam’s sacrifice and rebuild her country [page 233]. She tells Tariq, "I feel like I have to go back. Staying here, it doesn't feel right anymore" [page 233]. Laila embodies a more active and outwardly focused form of resilience. Both women demonstrate their resilience through their relationships with each other. Initially, there is tension between Mariam and Laila, but they eventually find strength and solidarity in their friendship. This relationship allows them to support each other emotionally and practically, highlighting a shared capacity for resilience and sisterhood. Mariam’s role as a protector to Laila and her children is a powerful symbol of her resilience. Laila’s ability to learn from Mariam’s quieter, more accepting approach allows her to make self-sacrificing decisions as well, to take care of her family.

**Contrasting and Complementary Strengths:** While Mariam initially embodies a more passive form of resilience and Laila a more active form, their approaches become more complementary as the story progresses. Mariam’s quiet endurance paves the way for Laila’s determination, while Laila’s agency and hope help Mariam to find a sense of purpose and belonging. Their distinct types of resilience are highlighted in their reactions to Rasheed. Mariam takes abuse quietly, while Laila challenges and confronts him when she can. Ultimately, their relationship allows them to navigate the harsh realities of their lives with greater strength. By juxtaposing Mariam’s quiet strength and endurance with Laila’s determination and agency, Hosseini illustrates the diverse ways that women can demonstrate resilience in the face of war, oppression, and personal hardship.

**Characters**

Mariam’s defiance in confronting Rasheed (p. 345) encapsulates her growth from passivity to empowerment. Laila’s courage in enduring Rasheed’s abuse for her children’s sake echoes the broader struggles of Afghan women (p. 278).

**Mariam**

**Early Life and Isolation:** Mariam begins her life as an illegitimate child, a *harami*, living in a *kolba* with her embittered mother, Nana. Her early life is characterized by isolation and a lack of love and acceptance. Nana’s repeated emphasis that she is a *harami* instills in Mariam a sense of being unwanted and unworthy. Although Jalil, her father, visits her and shows affection, he is not a constant presence in her life. Mariam’s early experiences lead her to believe that she is not worthy of the things that others have, including love, family, and acceptance. Her feelings of isolation are compounded by Nana’s constant reminders of her illegitimate status and the limitations placed on her as a woman.

**Forced Marriage and Initial Passivity:** Mariam's life takes a drastic turn when she is forced into marriage with Rasheed, a much older man. This event further isolates her from the life she knew and places her in a situation where she is subject to abuse and mistreatment. Mariam's response to hardship is first passive, something Nana had taught her to do to accept her destiny and endure her circumstances. Perceiving herself as a "weed," she only has one out: endurance. She suffers the abuse at Rasheed's hands and the pain of her infertility quietly for a year.

Transformation through Relationships: When Mariam befriends Laila, her life changes. In particular, her relationship with Aziza is transformative as she encounters, for the first time, unilateral love. This new love has unmade her sense of self as *harami* and has made her feel needed and valuable. And her relationship with Laila goes from hostile to sisterhood. They become allies and confidantes.

**Agency and Resistance:** Mariam’s journey culminates in her act of killing Rasheed, an act of resistance against her oppressor and a declaration of agency. This action demonstrates that she is no longer the passive woman who once accepted her fate, but an individual who can make her own choices. Although this act results in her execution, it is ultimately an act of self-sacrifice to save Laila and her children, which shows the depth of her love and newfound agency. It's in this moment that Mariam fully embraces her strength and worth, demonstrating how much her character has evolved. She tells Laila: "It is fair...I've killed our husband... It isn't right that I run" [page 217].

**Laila**

**Privileged Upbringing:** Laila is presented as a sharp, intelligent, and independent young woman who enjoys a relatively privileged upbringing in Kabul. She has access to education and is encouraged to pursue her dreams. Laila's relationship with her father, Babi, is characterized by love and intellectual stimulation, which allows her to have a different perspective from Mariam. This upbringing fosters a sense of self-worth and hope for the future.

**Life Under Oppression:** Laila’s life is dramatically altered by war, loss, and displacement. She loses her parents and Tariq, leaving her overwhelmed with grief and compassion. Sexual slavery is a significant theme in her life, from what happened in the past until when she got married to Rasheed, an older man. The rape and the house burning are bad enough that her family when she attempts to leave, takes him with her in order to protect him. Laila represents the brutality of the Taliban rule of the country. She is a woman who is in distress, who must be protected by her daughter, Aziza, as well as suffer physical abuse by Rasheed. Laila's journey through oppressive circumstances demands immense endurance; however, amid all her suffering, she clings to a singular hope: her children. She attempts to protect herself and her children from their hazardous surroundings by being intelligent. Additionally, she asserts her autonomy as she tries to break away from the household where Rasheed keeps her and builds a sisterly connection with Mariam. Initially, their interactions are frosty, but soon, they develop more profound, more solid relationships based on trust and mutual care, which enables them to support each other. Furthermore, the safety of her children becomes one of the key elements of Laila's life throughout the story. Despite the rough times Laila endures, she is spiritedly optimistic about her life. Eventually, she rededicates herself to Tariq and resumes allegiance to her homeland of Kabul for its rebuilding. She said this effort was a hope for peace and a prosperous nation. On Monday, she plans to go to Kabul on her return to pay tribute to Mariam's memory and to give meaning to her sacrifices. In this case study, Mariam is reclusive at the beginning. However, she becomes a person who is not passive about her life because of her relationships with Laila and Aziza. This process is established on a theme of rebellion that is crucial to the story of Laila's life in her privileged class. The final one, though a complex evolution, shows a rich experience of oppression, and ultimately, Laila decides to come home and help rebuild because her homeland was destroyed.

**Setting and Atmosphere**

In light of Khaled Hosseini's elucidation, Kabul functions symbolically and metaphorically to depict the social and personal challenges the character faces in A Thousand Splendid Suns. Therefore, the inner changes of the characters' internal worlds and the general pain of Afghan people are reflected through envisioning the city as the symbol of hope turned to war.

**Kabul as a Symbol of Lost Hope:** In the first chapters, the reader is introduced to a beautiful Kabul of gardens, shops, and a general hopeful outlook. This is well captured through experiences such as those of early-age characters like Laila, who, despite a poor background, is at, tends to school and is optimistic. However, even with this trend, as the novel progresses, Kabul becomes closely connected to violence and turmoil as the characters' interiority turns a darker page. Captured by the war and destruction that befell the city, these ladies symbolize the failure in the personal lives of the two heroines. Despite the beauty of Kabul, the increase in violence and oppression gives a great sense of insecurity that the characters cannot eliminate. The Impact of Political Turmoil on Daily Life: Community politics becomes apparent and evident in the character's life, especially in relation to the dramatic setting, Kabul, where the following events transpire: political invasion by the Soviet Union, the rise of Mujahideen rule, and the repressive Taliban regime. This roller coaster situation is also seen in such things as warfare, rocket launches, and changing loyalty of friends, which puts the citizens in a state of chronic insecurity. Such conditions depict the result of political instability that enhances human suffering, especially for Mariam and Laila, who suffer under pressure from ruthless male authority and oppressive political regimes. The uncertainty in their lives can play a significant role in the increasing shift in the political system. For example, when the Mujahideen arrived first time, they are a short-lived root of light; as others battle for self-preservation, the structure suggests that characters do not learn and grow to create a better livelihood among themselves but retreat into quarantine, and hostility ensues.

**Kabul as Battlefield:** The city has become a battlefield as different factions battle for control. Neighborhoods are shattered, and the ongoing climate of violence pushes people away from places, creating a sense of profound loss. In addition, the far-reaching violence and deplorable living conditions significantly affect the characters' day-to-day lives. The characters have to navigate shifting boundaries within Kabul, with different warlords controlling different areas. This fragmented city mirrors their own fragmented lives, where they must constantly adapt to survive the volatile conditions.

**The Symbolism of Specific Places:** Specific locations within Kabul also carry symbolic weight. For example, the Presidential Palace, once a symbol of power and order, becomes a site of violence and bloodshed5. The Pol-e-Charkhi prison, where those connected with Daoud Khan's regime are killed, represents the brutality and injustice of the political landscape. The once vibrant neighborhoods become battle zones, reflecting the loss of safety and security. The descriptions of specific places that the characters frequent, like the mosques, the market, and the streets, show the ways in which the characters adapt to their circumstances and struggle to maintain a sense of normalcy amid chaos.

**The Resilience of the City and its People:** The novel shows how Kabul and its people bounce back. Even when things get bad, characters like Laila try to stay hopeful and want to build again. This shows how strong Afghans are. The novel talks about how Kabul has been taken over and rebuilt many times. This stands for how Afghans can get through tough times. When Kabul gets new schools and roads later on, it's like how the characters start to heal and get better. The city's story of being attacked and bouncing back is a lot like what happens to the characters. It proves that both the city and the people who live there can make it through awful times and come out okay on the other side.

**Kabul as a Reflection of Internal Conflicts:** Kabul's condition reflects the inner conflicts and feelings of the characters. The city's disorder often matches the characters' inner turmoil, pain from loss, and wish to be free. Mariam's feeling alone and left out is evident in the city's run-down, war-damaged state. Laila's drive and wish to be free come through in her longing for a better Kabul. Hosseini weaves Mariam and Laila's personal stories with the bigger story of how Kabul changes. This powerfully conveys how war and control affect people and society. The city is not just a place where things happen. It is a force that shapes the characters' lives and shows their inner experiences. This shows how personal struggles and significant events in history are linked. The places in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* do more than just set the scene. They back up the characters' emotional journeys, showing their inner feelings and changing lives. The book uses specific places to show and boost the characters' feelings about how they grow as people and the big changes in their lives.

**The *Kolba* and Mariam’s Isolation:** Mariam's early years in the *kolba*, a tiny secluded home outside Herat, mirror her feelings of loneliness and neglect. The *kolba* confines her, showing how unwanted she feels and how little she knows about the world. Its remote location and lack of neighbors highlight her disconnection from society. The small space reflects her emotional limits and sense of worthlessness. Jalil's visits turn the *kolba* into a brief place of comfort and care for Mariam. Nana cleans up and tidies herself when Jalil comes, which shows the big difference between her life with Jalil and her isolated life with Mariam. In the *kolba*, Mariam learns from Nana that she is a *harami* and that women are destined to suffer. This early setting lays the groundwork for Mariam's initial passivity and her belief that she does not deserve love or happiness.

**Jalil's House and Mariam's Disillusionment:** Mariam is denied that world of privilege and acceptance offered by Jalil's house in Herat. Mariam waits for Jalil to take her to the cinema, so after he fails, she goes to his house, where she meets coldness and rejection from his wives, and is soon married prospectively to Rasheed. Mariam's initial surges of hope and excitement when she arrives at Jalil's house are quickly squashed in the realization that she does not, in fact, belong there89. Her outsider status is emphasized in the house with its beautiful garden and the large family that features her (as a foreigner, all people should be with the extended family they possess). This setting is a time of turn, a turning point in her life, when she is married off and isolated further. The house and those in it remind her of what she cannot have and contrast drastically with her treatment of that house. Her wives reinforce Jalil's isolation and powerlessness, locking her in her room afterward.

**Rasheed's House and Oppression:** Mariam and Laila use the popular trope of the house as a symbol of oppression to represent Rasheed's house in Kabul as a symbol of oppression for both. After Mariam's marriage, the house is an uncomfortable, scary place at first. This is a place where she is beaten up and mentally harassed because it is a marriage that is oppressive. The house is where, over time, Mariam and Laila suffer together. They mirror their lack of freedom and control and the emotional darkness of the house's physical constraints, so those windows are boarded up, and the house is dark. It symbolizes their captivity. Violence and restrictions expand within the home until the physical setting echoes the emotional entrapment of their containment, and the house is a space of shared trauma for their shared suffering. In turn, the house becomes a signifier of these women's loss of personal space and autonomy.

**Kabul's Streets and the City's Transformation:** A city in chaos and violence, the streets of Kabul, which were once free and regular, are a mirror image of the city's descent into chaos and violence. For Laila, there is no question of the happy times: the cinema with Tariq or shopping with the parents. Once the city becomes a war zone, Laila goes through the same adolescence in being taught about the world she was once ignorant of and her privileged life coming to an end. The streets of Kabul, now brimming with danger and uncertainty, remind the characters that they feel displaced and vulnerable. The iniquities of women's lives in public spaces closely resemble those women face in their private lives, which enlarges the gaps between what binds them and their lack of freedom and autonomy. The characters are reminded of where they go, the war-torn streets, where they have experienced such a pain as a collective.

**The Orphanage and Hope:** The orphanage becomes this space of despair and hope where Laila and Mariam take Aziza. It is initially a place of last resort, a signal of the dreadful straits in which they find themselves. At the same time, however, it is also where Laila is given the purpose of becoming a teacher and protector of other children in the orphanage. Laila and Mariam get solace in the orphanage by caring for Aziza and the other children. Then Laila returns to work at the orphanage, turning it into an educational center and giving hope, the same that it was of her journey to resilience and a chance for a better future. Laila's emotional growth and her never-letting-go spirit wrought from the trauma she has experienced echo as well in the transformation of the orphanage. Laila's contribution to the reconstruction of her community and her commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan is the improved orphanage.

**Murree and Tranquility:** Laila and Tariq finally end up in Murree, where they become temporary refugees and heal. The contrast for this setting is stark, as young Americans still grieve for lives torn asunder in wars in Afghanistan, as a space of peace and relative comfort in comparison to the chaos and violence in Kabul. Murree is as tranquil as Laila is because Murrained feels security and love from Tariq. Yet, Laila sees this is insufficient and wants to return to Kabul to help rebuild the country and ensure Mariam's sacrifice meant nothing. The peaceful setting highlights Laila's inner conflict between her desire for personal happiness and her cultural responsibility to her homeland and to honor Mariam's sacrifice. The Return to Kabul and Herat: Laila's return to Afghanistan to visit Mariam's *kolba* in Herat at the end of the story completes her emotional arc. Her visit to the Kolba reflects both Kabul's changed and damaged state, a racing of Mariam's past and a way to honor her memory. It is a full circle moment for Laila, who is returning home, but now with the purpose and will to rebuild a new, better future. The return of these settings strengthens her resolve to complete these obligations and pay tribute to the sacrifices of others. Her renewed sense of purpose and emotional resilience are highlighted in the descriptions of these places. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is full of important settings because these hold the character's emotional arc in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The characters' inner states and changing circumstances have all been reflected in their descriptions of the kola, Jalil's house, Rasheed's house, Kabul's streets, the orphanage, Murree, and Laila's return to Kabul and Herat. Hosseini created the overall picture using these settings and helped the readers chew it better as it related to the characters' journeys and the dreadful effects of war and virtual captivity.

**Cultural and Historical Context**

**Depiction of Afghanistan**

Fittingly, socio-political events are intertwined in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, used to mold the characters' lives and chronicle Afghanistan's troubled history. The novel shows us how these big things happen to Mariam and Laila, to their lives, in a way that reflects what the war, political instability, and general oppression do to all the people out there. The overthrow of King Zahir Shah and the Rise of Daoud Khan: At fourteen, Mariam learns in 1973 when Jalil tells her that King Zahir Shah was overthrown in a bloodless coup by his cousin Daoud Khan while he was in Italy for medical treatment. Afghanistan's monarchy ends when Daoud Khan establishes a republic and acts as president. This is an event of political change, but its first consequence on Mariam's lonely life is minimal. And this is one of the first indications of the instability that will run rampant in Afghanistan throughout the novel. The Communist Coup and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan: The novel deals with the 1978 coup, where the communist party, PDPA, reaches power and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan is founded. As a result, it is portrayed to us by Mariam, who is, to begin with, confused and uncertain about their meaning. The coup marks a new turn in Afghanistan's politics and the start of a bloody, violent era over which the lives of the characters and the country will be profoundly and permanently changed. It says it respects both Islamic and democratic values. The general confusion of the Afghan people concerning the concept of communism is revealed through Mariam. This was an era marked by summary executions of those aligned with Daoud Khan's regime by the communists.

**The Soviet Invasion and the Mujahideen Resistance:** The central part of the novel concerns the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In the novel, we are given the Soviet presence and the resulting conflict from Laila's and Mariam's points of view. The war is direct in Laila's life, the loss of her brothers, Ahmad and Noor, who choose to join the Mujahideen in the fight with the Soviets. Laila's family is deeply affected by the war, her mother's fixation with the war, and her brothers' martyrdom. And a genuinely horrific war that is prolonged by the resistance of the Mujahideen, with assistance from those whose international actors include the United States. Babi is no longer forced to become a teacher. It also enacts the invasion and Soviet soldiers in the streets of Kabul, affecting the lives of the people there many mixes relief with apprehension at the future following the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

**The Mujahideen's Rise to Power and the Civil War:** After the Soviet withdrawal, the Mujahedeen factions, previously united in their unified struggle with a common enemy, fought a civil war against themselves. The time depicted in the novel is a chaotic, violent time, in which, as Mujahideen factions turn on each other, they add more depth and more fear to Kabul. The rockets and the fighting that follows both force Laila and her family to take shelter, but the neighborhood they live in is torn apart. As always, the cycle of violence and the uneven failure of these groups to end the war in Afghanistan have been thrown out to highlight the infighting among the Mujahideen further. Because it is no longer safe to attend school, Babi takes over the job of Laila's education. Tariq and Laila decide to leave for Pakistan, but they are caught trying to leave the country at a bus stop.

**The Taliban's Rise to Power and Imposition of Strict Islamic Laws:** Another significant change in Afghanistan's socio-political landscape has been the rise of the Taliban to power in 1996. Through the experience of Mariam and Laila, the group of Taliban is shown as enforcing strict *Shari'a* law. They withhold women's rights strictly to what the Taliban dictates. Under the Taliban rule, personal freedoms, in particular those of women, as well as cultural and historical sites, are lost. Taliban is against television, music, and other types of entertainment. Laila lives an ever-lower quality of life due to the oppression of women by the Taliban. The Taliban's harsh rules and brutal punishment are imposed on Mariam and Laila. Initially greeted warmly, Rasheed hopes the Taliban will bring stability, but the lack of it, in turn, makes the quality of life for all Afghans even worse.

**The American Intervention and the Fall of the Taliban:** The novel also addresses the American intervention in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks. While this event does not go into too much detail, it is presented as a possible source of hope and change after all those years of oppression. The novel showcases skepticism about the American intervention as a moment of liberation from the Taliban's rule and a means to build Afghanistan again. However, it also shows violence ongoing in the country and portrays Laila. Laila and Tariq wish they could go back to Kabul after hearing that the Taliban has left the major cities.

**The Aftermath and Hope for the Future:** Laila's return to Afghanistan and rebuilding her country is the novel's end. The final section features these ideas of resilience and the prospects of a more distant, better future. I want to rebuild my country and honor the sacrifices that have also been made. She also pays tribute to Mariam, whose dying brought Laila's freedom into being. However, the novel also touts the point of hope and wanting a peaceful and just Afghanistan. Laila works back at the orphanage, and moving to live in her homeland is the next step in her country's future. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a background to Afghanistan's socio-political history and gives the personal stories of Mariam and Laila. This novel demonstrates how war and oppression, among other political events, form the characters' lives and experiences; the basis of Afghan society can hardly be imagined without war and oppression. The emotional and personal growth of the characters in the novel is significantly impacted by the events shown in the novel, including the Soviet invasion, the rise of Mujahideen, and the takeover by the Taliban, and also proves how personal and political life are related to each other*.*

**Gender Dynamics**

The Asian Novel “A Thousand Splendid Suns” is an arc when it comes to representing the roles of Afghan men and women in a society that is powerfully shaped by patriarchal gender norms. The narrative shows how patriarchal stigma impinges upon how women live their daily lives, from within familial relations to the ways limiting their rights are imposed.

**Patriarchal Structures:**

Control Over Women's Lives: Kinsley illustrates how the male characters dictate the fates of the main characters and how men have dominated women, unable to move freely, acquire education, marry, and remain independent. One example is when Jalil ultimately forces Mariam to marry Rasheed against her will, as men, at least in Tolstoy's novel, are the authority figures in their spouses' lives. Moreover, Rasheed coerces Mariam and Laila alike and, by extension, dictates what those two should and should not do, who he can and cannot be friends with, what jobs should be a man's work, and what a woman can and cannot do at home and outside. Women's working and schooling continue to be banned, giving men further power over women under the Taliban's rule. Marriage as a Tool of Control: In traditional marriages, husbands and wives are often portrayed in a manner that positions women as property. Mariam is given away in marriage at a young age to Rasheed, a much older man, without her consent. The novel shows how women are expected to fulfill domestic duties and bear children to satisfy their husbands’ needs and desires. Furthermore, Rasheed's desire for a son underscores the patriarchal preference for male offspring.

**Violence and Abuse:** The novel portrays the physical and emotional abuse that women endure at the hands of men. Rasheed subjects both Mariam and Laila to domestic violence, using physical and emotional abuse as means of asserting his dominance. The novel also includes other examples of violence against women that show how abuse is normalized within the patriarchal structure.

**Social and Cultural Norms:** The novel highlights how cultural norms reinforce patriarchal structures. Nana's pronouncements about women's roles, emphasizing *tahamul* (endurance), reflect the societal expectations placed on women to passively accept their fate. The novel depicts how the societal expectation for women to be submissive is internalized by some women, like Mariam in her early years, and how they come to believe that they are inherently inferior. The women in Mariam's neighborhood discussing their 'miserable luck' with their husbands suggests a cultural acceptance of female suffering.

**Legal and Religious Justifications:** The patriarchal control over women is reinforced by religious interpretations and laws. The Taliban's interpretation of *Shari'a* law is used to justify the oppression and subjugation of women. Rasheed also uses religious arguments to assert his dominance and control over his wives, such as his claim that a woman's face is her husband's business only.

**Women's Resistance:**

Despite the strong manifestation of patriarchy in its most oppressive forms in the tale, the female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* exhibit various forms of resistance.

**Acts of Defiance:** Both Mariam and Laila exhibit acts of rebellion against male domination, albeit in different ways. I believe that Mariam's initial act of defiance occurs when she leaves her home in search of Jalil and ultimately murders Rasheed. Laila's methods of rebellion include her refusal to submit to Rasheed, her determination to obtain money for her child through any means necessary, including stealing from Rasheed, and her eventual decision to leave him.

**Seeking Education and Knowledge:** The novel also advocates for women's education. Laila’s desire for knowledge and her willingness to endure significant challenges in pursuit of it symbolize a rebellion against the traditions that subordinate women. While scholars emphasize the importance of education, Nana holds the belief that educated women are detrimental, asserting that all women need to know is how to endure.

**Developing Solidarity and Sisterhood:** The evolving relationship between Mariam and Laila, characterized by initial competition followed by mutual support, highlights the subjugation of women by men. Their experiential support for one another enables them to mitigate the losses they endure and find ways to withstand the violence and control exerted by Rasheed. This sisterhood allows them to share the burden of liberating themselves from the oppressive yoke of patriarchal society; a poignant example of this is when Mariam sacrifices her life for Laila.

**Internal Strength and Resilience:** The women in the novel exhibit remarkable internal strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Despite numerous challenges, they actively seek ways to survive and maintain their dignity. Notably, Mariam transforms from a submissive individual into a woman capable of making strong decisions, which exemplifies her newfound strength. Additionally, Laila’s endurance and her determination to ensure her child's survival, despite facing severe hardships, further illustrate the theme of female strength.

**Challenging Traditional Gender Roles:** Laila's passive defiance demonstrates her refusal to accept the preordained role of a docile and obedient wife. Similarly, Mariam's act of killing Rasheed highlights her rebellion against the societal expectation that women should be polite and submissive. This act, despite its severe ramifications, underscores the struggle for equality and justice that both women face. To summarize, the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* illustrates the effects of a patriarchal society while simultaneously showcasing the strategies women employ to navigate this world. The defiance, solidarity, and resilience of these women convey far more than the challenges they face; they embody the true spirit of Afghan women through their resistance and endurance.

**Critical Reception**

**Reception in Literary Circles**

However, Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is culturally significant; it chronicles Afghan women's lives against the historical background of Afghanistan. Stemming from trauma, memory, and themes of cultural oppression based on women under Islamic regimes, the narrative explores the struggles and resilience of its female characters; the novel is about the struggles of women under Islamic regimes (Shalini & Aruna, 2022). It also describes education, marriage, and domestic violence in Afghan society (Efrilia & Setiawan, 2020). Sapkota (2020) gives the narrative spanning a few decades where the instability of politics takes women and children. As the protagonists are not portrayed as passive victims but as individuals who fight oppression and choose their fate, then there are many challenges they have to face. Her work does not live up to stereotypes as it offers; simultaneously, Hosseini offers a complex picture of Afghan women and their dreams, trials, and ability to survive in the face of adversity (Stuhr, 2011). Because recent analyses of Khaled Hosseini's 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' have focused on female solidarity, empathy, and resistance to patriarchal oppression, not all of these are relevant here. The novel depicts how women lived through the war in Afghanistan and how they dealt with it by not giving up their personal freedom and resilience (Aminova, 2024). The narrative circulates through a postcolonial feminist lens within which the devaluation and violence to which female characters, especially Mariam and Laila, are afflicted in a patriarchal culture have been portrayed (Shabanirad & Seifi, 2014). Sisterhood is a survival tool that emerges with a theme of resilience and empowerment of women facing societal constraints (Aruna & Thambi, 2024). Hosseini also breaks stereotypes by depicting women as stronger and capable of defying a patriarchal limitation (Khan et al., 2021). Together, these analyses highlight how the novel portrays women helping one another, resisting oppression, and carving out spaces for safety and empowerment in an inhospitable social environment.

**Reader Impact**

It is causing much discourse among people trying to advocate for Afghan women's rights because people relate to Mariam and Laila's plights (p. 301). Literature regarding what depicts Afghan culture and women's issues is analyzed in the numerous studies that can contribute to what global readers know about these aspects. Hosseini's novels bridge Afghan and global audiences, mediating understanding of Afghan life and culture (Sarfaraj & Jha, 2021). Gender relations in post-Taliban Afghanistan is a central theme exemplified by Seierstad's 'The Bookseller of Kabul' and others. From the analysis of Afghan women's repression in Hosseini's "A Thousand Splendid Suns," this work argues that historical, political, and cultural factors played a crucial role in shaping the experiences of Afghan women (Ranawat, 2023). By doing so, these works shed new light on Afghan women's lives and break down stereotypes, helping to create a more nuanced understanding. It argues that literature is a compelling medium to help us all develop an understanding and empathy with a world that is becoming more interconnected than ever.

Khaled Hosseini's novel A Thousand Splendid Suns has shaped how the West sees Afghanistan and often with controversy. The novel promotes orientalist discourse by representing the West as heroic and the East as an enemy, thus consolidating a binary opposition in the reader's mind (Siahmansouri & Hoorvash, 2020). It shows sociological issues related to education in Afghanistan, marriage, and domestic violence (Efrilia & Setiawan, 2020). One of the highlighted aspects of the book is just how men, predominantly Islamic, treat Muslim women in Afghanistan through various forms of gender discrimination and what women in Afghanistan do in the face of oppression (Shaikh et al., 2018). However, although the novel offers the potential to enhance multicultural education in American secondary curricula, it has sometimes been censored in U.S. classrooms. However, despite international readership, Hosseini's readers have expressed enormous emotional reactions on his website (Agnello et al., 2009).

**Conclusion**

**Summary**

A lot more than a story, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini is much more than just a story; it is a powerful examination of resilience in the face of oppression. Through this narrative, Hosseini amplifies the voices of Afghan women, enabling him to transcend cultural barriers and advocate for enhanced international understanding. In the novel, the reasons behind Afghan women's strength and their methods of combating the unjust conditions of their society are both multifaceted and complex. The depiction of gender relations and discrimination in Afghan society serves to illustrate how a fixation on rigid gender roles can incite resistance against cultural domination (Chaudhary, 2020). The joys of motherhood and the sorrows of loss are experienced through the perspectives of two women, Laila and Mariam, who, despite being ensnared in a patriarchal world governed by the Pashtun code of honor, assert their agency in making decisions about their lives and futures. In this manner, the novel illustrates how Afghan women cultivate sisterhood and forge resistance against oppressive structures to attain peace within their families (Chaudhary, 2020). Hosseini's works call attention to marginalization and advocate for change: the women gradually come to understand their subordinate societal status, seek empowerment, and search for their identities (Imran et al., 2020). Thus, the novel primarily embodies the real issues faced by women, celebrates their achievements, and skillfully dismantles social barriers to promote global tolerance.

**Implications**

Through Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, students are encouraged to think critically about gender and social issues in postcolonial societies. The society depicted in the novel presents a multifaceted portrayal of the violation of women’s rights in Afghanistan, particularly concerning gender and power relations as well as cultural norms. From a materialist feminist perspective, the narrative illustrates the effects of socio-political changes on gender relations, highlighting political shifts as a factor contributing to the regression of women’s status (Arshad et al., 2024). It analyzes how the gendered structure of Afghan society perpetuates cultural power dynamics and examines how female characters cultivate sisterhood to resist oppressive systems (Chaudhary, 2020). The novel showcases various forms of resistance, reflecting a culture of combating gender oppression recognized by Afghan women (Gordan & Almutairi, 2013). These analyses position the novel at the forefront of contemporary discussions surrounding femininity and post coloniality, emphasizing the exploration of underlying issues related to gender injustice and the violent imposition of cultural imperialism.

**Feminist Studies**

**Patriarchal Structures and Female Oppression:** The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* shows just how difficult these systems of patriarchy can keep women oppressed. It demonstrates how social norms, religious exegesis, and formal law conspire to limit female autonomy and agency. A central theme of the novel is the control exercised by the control men (i.e., men in positions of authority) over women's lives in dictating where they may and may not go, what they may and may not learn about, and the conditions under which they may marry. This is similar to the way feminist analyses have made of how patriarchal societies diminish women by the way Jalil and Rasheed treat Mariam and Laila.

**Intersectionality:** Laila and Mariam's experiences prove how gender interacts with other types of social stratification, such as class, ethnicity, and marital status, in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini. Furthermore, as a *harami* (illegitimate), Mariam is among other layers of discrimination, which are an extra burden for her marginalization as a woman. But this exemplifies intersectionality, how so many types of oppression can co-occur in a way that impacts an individual's life. The further distinction of how Mariam and Laila were treated versus Jalil's legitimate daughters and the impact of social status on women's lives shows.

**Domestic Violence:** The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts a side picture of domestic violence where domestic violence serves as a tool to maintain male dominance. It comes as no surprise that Rasheed physically and emotionally abused Mariam and Laila, narrators of violence against women in patriarchal societies. It is in the spirit of feminist debate surrounding the sex of violence and its use to discipline women.

**Female Solidarity and Resistance:** Even in the most desolate conditions, the power of female solidarity and resistance is also celebrated in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Mariam and Laila bond well to show the power of women standing by one another in the oppression. But Mariam killing Rasheed and Laila's fight to protect her children show that there is still agency the female can bring in oppressive circumstances. This is also on the level of feminist discussions on agency, empowerment, and masculine repression.

**Challenging Traditional Gender Roles:** Actions of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* female characters challenge traditional gender roles. Laila's refusal to settle into a subordinate role and her struggle with education are just two ways women can resist society's forces. Like Mariam's later act of resistance against Rasheed, although inspired by desperation, it goes against the passivity expected of her in her society. This is the opposite of what Nana says about women having to endure.

**Postcolonial Studies:**

Impact of Colonial and Postcolonial Conflicts: The novel exemplifies the nuances of how dissent, war, political instability, and foreign intervention destabilize societies, and more broadly, exacerbate the marginalization of women. As key factors that increase suffering and oppression, in particular, for women, the fate of the Mujahideen conflict and Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban are portrayed. Such studies can be seen as part of a postcolonial study field that investigates how colonialism affects relationships between men and women and is a form of conflict that can reinforce constitutions of patriarchal power.

**Cultural Identity and Hybridity:** The Tensions between Tradition and Modernity in Postcolonial Afghanistan, a case study of Afghan women's lives, is at the core of A Thousand Splendid Suns. Nana and Rasheed are conservative, and Babi and Laila are more progressive, a contrast that is carried out in the novel. This contrast is a marker of this postcolonial condition, where traditions merge with modern ones. The novel also shows how some traditional cultural values rationalize oppression.

**Resistance to Cultural Imperialism:** Implicitly, the novel criticizes how extraneous forces such as the Taliban can enforce their views and values. Cultural imperialism is demonstrated from within; the restrictions placed on women during the Taliban regime stem from these cultural values that were imposed by foreign powers. Women like Laila exercise their resistance to such restrictions as it serves as a way of asserting cultural identity against external oppression.

**Representation of the "Other"**: The novel serves as an excellent tool to challenge the stereotypical perceptions of Afghan women that dominate Western media. Through the stories of Mariam and Laila, the novel debunks the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim woman. Furthermore, it encapsulates multiculturalism, tenacity, and an empowering portrayal of women facing hardship. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini portrays Afghan women in a manner that significantly contrasts with the perspectives typically held by Western audiences (Stuhr, 2011). The novel's exploration of oppression highlights issues of patriarchy, particularly through the experiences of its two female protagonists, Mariam and Laila (Verma, 2023). Although these women endure various forms of gender discrimination, including physical and psychological violence, forced marriage, and limited access to education and healthcare (Shaikh et al., 2018), they are not depicted merely as victims. Instead, the novel emphasizes their resilience and capacity to combat oppression (Stuhr, 2011). Education emerges as a crucial strategy that women can employ to dismantle oppressive structures (Shaikh et al., 2018). By presenting these intricate narratives, Hosseini compels readers to move beyond the simplistic caricature of Afghan women and gain a deeper understanding of the historical, political, and cultural forces that contribute to their circumstances (Ranawat, 2023).

**Informing Contemporary Studies:**

**Intersection of Oppression:** In exploring the relationships between gender, war, and cultural imperialism, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* illustrates the necessity of understanding oppression as an intersectional phenomenon. The narrative reveals how various systems of power can interconnect and amplify one another, significantly impacting the lives of those on the margins.

**Global Feminism:** The novel exemplifies how the feminist approach is relevant on an international scale, highlighting various forms of women's oppression across different cultures and societies. This underscores the significance of broad frameworks for understanding women's experiences worldwide, while also considering the unique environmental factors that shape their circumstances and challenges.

**Post-Conflict Societies:** The novel offers critical insights into the challenges of state reconstruction in countries and societies ravaged by war and conflict, particularly concerning the implementation of initiatives aimed at combating violence against women and promoting women's justice. It thus amplifies the voices of women in peace-building processes, advocating for the establishment of equitable and inclusive societies.

**Agency and Resistance:** This analysis explores four aspects of women's resistance as depicted in Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Afghan women through a postcolonial and feminist lens, the narrative highlights their struggle for recognition and the reclamation of their agency (Gordan & Almutairi, 2013). Both protagonists confront cultural and societal norms that oppress women, striving to establish a new culture that reflects their desires (Aiman et al., 2022). The novel illuminates’ critical issues faced by women in war zones, highlighting their oppression while simultaneously portraying them as agents of change (Töngür & Çevik, 2019). By mapping the struggles and subtle resistance of Afghan women in his work, Hosseini reveals the nuanced interplay between culture, gender inequality, and women's subversion of oppression (Gordan & Almutairi, 2013; Töngür & Çevik, 2019). This narrative enriches the discourse on Third World Feminism and postcolonial feminist research.

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