



Research Paper

Muslim Women's Identity in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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ABSTRACT :

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghani-American novelist of diasporic Afghani fiction . He presents the issues of identity within and without the Muslim majority contexts. Since time immemorial, the patriarchy has been enjoying a great privilege over women. In this novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) he presents Afghanistan as being a destitute , ruined country. He presents his heroines Mariam and Laila as having to live a life of unhappiness and torture under the rule of Taliban . It is portrayed as controlled by religious fanatics that treat women with such brutality . Scholars hardly talked about the women's identity who are belonging to a Muslim dominated region like Afghanistan . The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* covers three decades of anti- Soviet-jihad , civil war and Taliban tyranny seen from the cultural, political , religion and social structures of Afghanistan in degrading and devaluing Afghan women. All the female characters of this novel endure terrifying situations. Hosseini throws light on the need to change the situation so that women can enjoy their dignified status to lead a normal peaceful life .

KEYWORDS: - Diasporic, patriarchy, religious fanatics, identity, tyranny.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The virtue of women is defined in relation with man's virtue. Women are always considered as subjects whose status is relegated to oblivion . They are forced to abide by the rules and regulations framed and assigned to them by patriarchal authorities.

In the Afghan societies these notions are still holding the prominent place in the guise of Muslim extremism. Muslim women are regarded as subjects to be confined within the boundary of four walls. They are living in the society not as parts but fractions. Women are always expected to be faithful to their husbands. The orthodox people , in the name of religion, narrow down the women's space and scope for religion .The women are deprived of the freedom that the males enjoy in society. As they remain detached from the mainstream society they feel alienation and are often discriminated. It can be seen as domestic violence.

II. DISCUSSION

Khaled Hosseini is a contemporary writer. In this novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, he represents that women's identity is alienated , discriminated and subjected to domestic violence. The background of this novel is Afghanistan's recent history. Muslim women's identity is represented through the character portrayal of Mariam and Laila.

During the war, people of Afghanistan suffered a lot from the Soviet military forces . Adding to this , the rule of Taliban created a horror among the people, especially among the women . They are always dominated and discriminated. Even today, in the name of religion, they are deprived of their rights. They are not allowed to move on the streets without a male companion. They are not allowed to take part in the social activities. They are not allowed to do job, not driving, not talking to a stranger, not allowed to take decision whom she wants to marry and whom not to . In many places women are not sent beyond the locality to receive

education . They are brought up to fulfil the men's desires only and to pay attention to the health of the family members and give birth of children . Their world is within the four walls only.

"Women are supposed to be as holders of men's honour or Names, they stay inside the domestic sphere and are supposed to be silent and voiceless".(Kiddle, 39).

Washington Post writer Jonathan Yardley suggests that "... the central theme of A Thousand Splendid Suns is the place of women in Afghan society ". A Thousand Splendid Suns throws light on the relationship between a mother and a daughter- Nana and her daughter Mariam as well as Laila and her daughter Aziza. Later, Mariam and Laila feel a bondage of mother-daughter relationship which led them to put resistance against the patriarchy .

Mariam is an illegitimate daughter of Jalil , a businessman . He owns a cinema . He lives with his three wives and nine children in Herat . But he does not allow Mariam and her mother Nana to live in his house. Nana lives in a small hut outside of the city .So , Nana resents Jalil for his indifference and deceptive attitude towards Mariam .

Mariam's mother is so much experienced of the then society that she warns her daughter-
"Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter : Like a compass needle that points North , a man's accusing finger always finds a woman . Always. You remember that , Mariam "

(Hosseini, 18)

Jalil visits them once a week . In spite of his promise to take Mariam to his movie theatre on her fifteenth birth day he does not come . So, Mariam decides to visit her father in his house but in vain . When she comes back home she find that her mother has committed suicide as she thought that Mariam had deserted her .Finding no other alternative Mariam is taken to Jalil's house . There, Mariam's marriage is immediately arranged with Rasheed, a shoe maker from Kabul .Rasheed is thirty years older than Mariam . Mariam does not want to marry Rasheed . But she can not express her opinion .Indeed, her voice is suppressed and she is forced to marry Rasheed . After marriage, Rasheed compels his wife to wear burqa much before the rule of Taliban.
" This brought the realization that there can be no justice for me , as a Muslim woman as long as patriarchy is justified and upheld in the name of Islam . The prevailing interpretations of the sharia do not reflect the values and principles that I hold to be at the core of my faith".

(Hosseini, 629) .

At first, Rasheed was kind to his wife . But gradually , he changes his mentality . He becomes extremely violent especially as Mariam miscarries several times . He comes to the conclusion that Mariam is unable to bear him a son . He becomes so cruel that he does hesitate to force her to eat stones. This shows violence which the women are to face in daily life.

Besides this pathetic story of Mariam , there is another girl named Laila who has to endure several kinds of violence . In the meantime, Laila grows up in a neighbouring house in Kabul. She becomes very intimate with a neighbouring friend, Tariq. When the war begins both Laila and Tariq's families decide to leave the city. But a rocket destroys Laila's house killing her parents and severely injuring her . As a consequence, Rasheed and Mariam sympathise with her and decides to bring her up .

With the passage of time Rasheed feels his interest for Laila . Gradually , he expresses his desire to marry her .In the meantime Laila has started to believe that Tariq died along with his family on their way out of the city . But at this time Laila discovered that she is pregnant with Tariq's child . So she does not disagree to marry Rasheed because she is now in need of a protection to protect herself and her child . She gives birth to a daughter who is named as Aziza . But Rasheed is unhappy and neglects the child for being a girl. During the course of life , Mariam and Laila become friends . They make a plan to run away from Rasheed and leave Kabul but in vain . Rasheed beat them both and tortures brutally .

A few years later , Taliban comes to power and imposes harsh rules to curtail women's rights . Women's hospitals are deprived of all facilities . In such a hospital , Laila is compelled to undergo a C-section without anesthesia to give birth to Rasheed's son, Zalmai .This incident highlights the brutal mentality of the patriarchy under the rule of Taliban . Laila and Mariam struggle a lot to bring up Zalmai whom Rasheed favours greatly over Aziza . One day, Rasheed's workshop burns down . He is forced to take other jobs . He sends Aziza to an orphanage . One day Laila goes to visit her daughter . But she has to endure severe torture when she is caught alone . It is instructed by the Taliban -

" 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 caught alone on the street , you will be beaten and sent home... Listen . Listen well . " (Hosseini , 270-271) .

As the situation becomes worse, suddenly Tariq appears and Laila is reunited with him . When Rasheed comes to know the fact he suspects Laila's relationship with Tariq . He savagely beats her and tries to strangle her but at once Mariam kills him with a shovel . She advises them to run away . Later , she confesses ok killing Rasheed . So , she is publicly executed . Laila and Tariq leave for Pakistan with Aziza and Zalmai. When the rule of Taliban ceases to exist Laila and Tariq return to Afghanistan . They stop in Mariam's native village and discover a package left by Mariam's father . They return to Kabul and use the money to repair yhe orphanage and Laila starts her job there as a teacher. In the meantime she becomes pregnant with her third child and she intends to name after Mariam if it is a girl.

III. CONCLUSION

Identification is the device which connects us to the society and makes us feel worth . The existing social rules are lopsided and not fair to the women . In order to control the women they areb often misguided by the name of religion . Sometimes, fear is created in their minds , often bitten inhumanly , left them in traumatic state .They are made feel that they are meant to take care of their children and husbands only . It focuses on the critical attention for the responsible social mechanism existing within such social set up . After the introduction of ISIS's terrorist activity women are made sex slave in the western Asia . Their existence has been reduced to a lump of flesh what will just fulfil men's lusty desire .Through the story of Mariam and Laila in A Thousand Splendid Suns Khaled Hosseini has presented the orthodox mentality of the patriarchal social set up . Both of them endure sever torture in life and struggle to revolt against the dominant patriarchy to establish their identity in their own way .

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