



ANALYSIS OF PORTRAYAL OF SOCIO -ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN A *THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS* BY KHALED HOSSEINI

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ABSTRACT

Mariam's life in Khaled Hosseini's 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' is marked by tragedy, oppression, and resilience. Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of Jalil, a wealthy businessman in the city of Herat. Jalil's rejection of Mariam and her mother, Nana, leads to a life of isolation and loneliness for Mariam. Mariam's life is further complicated when her mother commits suicide, leaving her completely alone and vulnerable. Mariam's life takes a tragic turn when Rasheed discovers that Laila is planning to leave him with their children. In a fit of rage, Rasheed beats Laila and Mariam intervenes to protect her friend. Rasheed then turns his violence towards Mariam, and in a final act of defiance, Mariam sacrifices herself to protect Laila and her children. Mariam's death is a tragic but heroic act that embodies her resilience and her willingness to resist oppression.

Keyword- *resilience,*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Khalid Hosseini is an acclaimed author, best known for his powerful storytelling and heart-wrenching narratives that delve deep into the human condition, particularly in the context of Afghanistan. His novels are not only literary achievements but also catalysts for social and



cultural conversations. The Thousand Splendid Suns, his second novel, is a testament to Hosseini's incredible ability to craft poignant stories that leave a lasting impact on readers. In this essay, we will first explore the life and career of Khalid Hosseini before delving into the themes and impact of The Thousand Splendid Suns.

Khalid Hosseini: An Author Beyond Borders

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965, Khalid Hosseini's early life was marked by his family's nomadic lifestyle, as they moved from Tehran to Paris and eventually to the United States, where they sought political asylum. This diverse upbringing shaped Hosseini's worldview and informed his writing, which often focuses on the intersection of personal and political experiences.

Mariam's father arranges her marriage to Rasheed, a much older man living in Kabul. Mariam's marriage to Rasheed is characterized by violence, abuse, and oppression. She is subjected to physical and emotional violence, forced to bear children, and isolated from the outside world. Mariam's attempts to assert her agency and resist Rasheed's control lead to further violence and punishment.

Mariam's life changes when Laila, a young woman from her neighbourhood, enters her life. Laila becomes Rasheed's second wife, and initially, Mariam resents her presence. However, over time, Mariam and Laila develop a bond and form a deep friendship. Their friendship is marked by mutual support, love, and sacrifice. Mariam becomes a mother figure to Laila's children and protects them from Rasheed's violence.

Hosseini initially pursued a career in medicine, earning a medical degree from the University of California, San Diego, and working as an internist for several years. However, his passion for storytelling never waned, and he eventually decided to pursue writing full-time. His first novel, The Kite Runner, published in 2003, became an international bestseller and was later adapted into a successful film.

1.2 Background of the novel

The Thousand Splendid Suns: A Tale of Resilience and Hope

Published in 2007, The Thousand Splendid Suns is a multi-generational story set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's tumultuous history. The novel revolves around the lives of two women, Mariam and Laila, whose lives become entwined by fate and the brutal realities of life in a war-torn country.



The story opens with Mariam, a young girl who is an illegitimate child, or "harami," living with her resentful mother in a small shack on the outskirts of Herat. After a series of tragic events, Mariam is forced into marriage with Rasheed, a much older and abusive man. Hosseini uses Mariam's character to explore the themes of gender discrimination and the struggles of women in traditional Afghan society.

Laila, the second protagonist, is introduced later in the novel as a bright and hopeful girl with dreams of education and a better future. However, her life takes a tragic turn when her family is killed in a rocket attack during the civil war. With nowhere to turn, Laila is taken in by Rasheed and becomes his second wife. The relationship between Mariam and Laila begins as one of jealousy and resentment but evolves into a strong bond of sisterhood and mutual support.

The Thousand Splendid Suns is a harrowing tale of love, loss, and redemption set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's turbulent history. The novel sheds light on the plight of Afghan women, their resilience in the face of oppression, and the power of hope to overcome adversity. Hosseini's vivid descriptions and compelling characters offer a window into a world that is both beautiful and brutal, leaving readers with a deeper understanding of the complexities of life in Afghanistan.

The apt title of the book should be 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' rather than 'A Thousand Midnight Suns.'

Khaled Hosseini's 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' offers an emotionally charged, vivid portrayal of the socio-economic status of women in Afghanistan. The novel sheds light on the oppressive conditions faced by the female characters, primarily Mariam and Laila, highlighting their resilience, strength, and camaraderie in the face of adversity. Set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's tumultuous political landscape from the Soviet invasion to the fall of the Taliban, the novel serves as a testament to the challenges faced by Afghan women and the indomitable spirit they possess.

The novel delves into the socio-economic disparities that women face in Afghanistan, illustrating the impact of war, political strife, and cultural norms on their lives. Through the eyes of Mariam and Laila, Hosseini paints a grim picture of women's limited access to education, employment opportunities, and social mobility. The harsh realities of their lives are compounded by the patriarchal social structure that permeates Afghan society, further restricting their agency and aspirations.

Education, a fundamental aspect of social and economic development, is portrayed as an elusive privilege for the female characters in 'A Thousand Splendid Suns.' Laila, initially



afforded the opportunity to attend school, is forced to abandon her education as the Taliban regime takes control of Kabul. Mariam, on the other hand, never has the chance to pursue formal education due to her status as an illegitimate child and the constraints placed on her by her husband. The denial of education, a basic human right, underscores the larger issue of gender discrimination and contributes to the perpetuation of socio-economic disparities among women in Afghanistan.

Employment opportunities for women are also severely limited in the novel. The constraints placed upon women's mobility and the lack of access to education contribute to their economic dependency on male relatives, spouses, or other male figures in their lives. In 'A Thousand Splendid Suns,' the female characters' financial well-being is entirely dependent on their husbands, with little to no opportunity for self-sufficiency. This economic dependency reinforces their vulnerability and subjugation to male dominance.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates the social constraints faced by Afghan women through the institution of marriage. Both Mariam and Laila are coerced into marriages at a young age, with little regard for their own desires or aspirations. Mariam is married off to the much older and abusive Rasheed, while Laila is forced into a loveless marriage with the same man after her family is killed in a bombing. The depiction of these oppressive marriages highlights the lack of agency and autonomy afforded to women in Afghan society.

Hosseini's portrayal of the challenges faced by women in Afghanistan is not solely focused on their socio-economic status, but also highlights the psychological toll that these hardships inflict. The novel explores the emotional and psychological impact of domestic violence, as both Mariam and Laila endure physical and emotional abuse at the hands of Rasheed. Their experiences offer a harrowing look into the devastating effects of gender-based violence on women's mental health and well-being.

Despite these oppressive conditions, 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' also emphasizes the resilience and strength of Afghan women. Mariam and Laila's unwavering determination to survive and their unbreakable bond of friendship provide a beacon of hope in an otherwise bleak landscape. Their defiance in the face of adversity demonstrates the power of women's solidarity and the potential for change in even the most trying of circumstances.

Hosseini's novel also hints at the possibility of progress and transformation for Afghanistan.

1.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Mariam's life in 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' is a powerful portrayal of the ways in which women's lives are shaped by patriarchal norms and structures. Mariam's experiences highlight the challenges and struggles that women face in a society that values

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men over women. Nonetheless, Mariam's life is also a testament to the resilience and strength of women in the face of adversity. Mariam's sacrifice for Laila and her children is a powerful symbol of the bonds of sisterhood and the enduring power of love and friendship.

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