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A Feminist Reading of Oppression in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Dedication

To every Meriem in this cruel world thank you for standing up
when u had every reason to fall apart.

To my family, especially my grandmother who left us too soon.

To my best friend Hadjer, thank you for all the great memories
throughout the past five years.

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Abstract

Afghani literature has become a significant site for scholarly inquiry into gender inequality, particularly in relation to the systemic marginalization of women within traditional and underdeveloped societies. Researchers have consistently highlighted how patriarchal norms shape and constrain the lives of women, often through institutionalized practices and cultural expectations. This dissertation seeks to examine the lived experiences of a representative Afghan girl as portrayed in literary narratives, focusing on the mechanisms of social control embedded in gendered hierarchies. The depiction of male characters such as Jalil, Rasheed, and Tariq, and their interactions with female characters like Nana, Laila, and Mariam, reveals a stratified social order in which authority is exercised to maintain dominance over women. According to recent data from UN Women, Afghanistan ranks among the lowest globally in gender equality, with women accessing only 17% of their potential across key domains such as education, health, and political participation. The 2024 ban on secondary education for girls and the exclusion of women from decision-making bodies further illustrate the entrenched nature of gender-based discrimination. These literary representations, therefore, not only reflect the realities of Afghan society but also underscore the broader challenges facing efforts toward social justice and gender reform, suggesting that current discourse is merely beginning to address the depth of the issue.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of my university studies, academic advisors have consistently emphasized the importance of selecting a dissertation topic that combines scholarly relevance with a degree of personal engagement. It is generally recognized that research grounded in a meaningful connection to the subject matter can lead to more thoughtful and in-depth analysis. In this context, the selected novel offers a compelling case for study, as it reflects themes and experiences that are both academically significant and personally resonant. This alignment supports a critical and reflective approach to the research, enabling a deeper exploration of identity and social structures within a rigorous academic framework.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a novel written by Afghan American author Khaled Hosseini, who was born to a teacher and a diplomat from Afghanistan. Hosseini relocated to California when he was fifteen, where he pursued medical studies, but ultimately chose a career in writing. This novel, His follow-up to the acclaimed debut *The Kite Runner* draws its title from the city of Kabul. It explores the lives of women in the city, highlighting their struggles, dependence, and confinement, as well as the despair, torture, and abuse experienced by the protagonists, Mariam and Laila.

The Set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's turbulent history, the narrative spans from the 1960s through the early 2000s, tracing the lives of two women from distinct generations whose paths eventually converge. Through their individual and shared experiences, the story provides a nuanced exploration of the evolving socio-political landscape of Kabul, particularly as it pertains to the status and lived realities of women. By situating the characters within key historical moments including the fall of the monarchy, the Soviet invasion, the rise of the Mujahideen, the Taliban regime, and the early post-Taliban reconstruction period, the novel offers a layered portrayal of how broader national upheavals directly impact women's rights, freedoms, and daily existence. This temporal and generational scope allows for a comparative analysis of the shifting conditions under which Afghan women have navigated public and private life, highlighting both the persistence of patriarchal structures and the subtle forms of

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resistance and resilience that emerge over time.

The title *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is derived from a verse in the poem Kabul by the seventeenth century Iranian poet Saib Tabrizi. The poem includes the line "one could not count the moons that shimmer on her roof, or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls".

Khaled Hosseini chose this title because it evocatively captures the beauty and resistance of Kabul and its people, particularly the women. The phrase symbolizes the hidden strength and radiance of the women in Kabul, who despite their struggles and sufferings, shine brightly and provide vital warmth to society.

This research aims to give a voice to those who have been silenced in a society that fosters extremism and often is associated with religious terrorism.

The main problem in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the limited freedom Afghani women have in a country rolling in social turbulences and political separation.

Therefore, the research question can be stated as follows:

- Do characters portray the authentic reality of the Afghani individual?
- Does this novel serve a certain propaganda?

- Is *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reflecting the true core of feminism?

Consequently, the following hypotheses need to be put to the test before being confirmed.

- The female protagonists are indeed showing the reality of women in Afghani society.
- The novel tackles the consequences of the patriarchy on women.
- The novel serves as an awareness tool to educate people on the living conditions of women in Afghanistan.

The research methodology integrates both descriptive and analytical approaches, beginning with a close reading of the novel, identifying key characters, and summarizing central themes. The study is structured into two chapters. The first chapter offers an in-depth literary review, including definitions of essential concepts relevant to the research, such as feminism. The second chapter presents a critical analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, examining diverse interpretations of the novel and addressing complex topics such as child grooming, suicide, greed, and other sensitive issues.

CHAPTER ONE:

Literature Review

1-1 Introduction

To write a clear and convincing research paper, it's important to first understand the main ideas that support the study. These key terms and concepts help shape the direction of the research and give a structure for explaining the data and building strong arguments. Without a good understanding of these ideas, the research could become confusing or go off track. That's why this chapter will focus on introducing and explaining the important concepts used in the study. By doing this early on, it helps make sure that the rest of the research is easier to follow and more consistent. These basic ideas will be used throughout the research to help explain the results and support the main points.

1-2 Afghani Literature

The definition of literature is largely subjective, as it varies from one individual to another. However, it is generally recognized as a collection of written works. The term "literature" originates from the Latin word "Literature," meaning "writing composed of letters."

It represents the artistic craft of arranging words, particularly in forms such as novels, plays, and poetry. As such, literature is a form of creative expression, rich in imagination and originality—distinct from journalism or scientific texts, which adhere to structured formats and methodologies.

Terry Eagleton, in his book *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), begins with a thought-provoking question:

"What is literature? The simplest answer is that literature is imaginative writing in the sense of fiction—writing that is not true. But even the briefest reflection on what people commonly include under the heading of literature suggests that this will not do." (p. 1)

Although a precise definition of literature remains elusive, familiarity with its various genres helps readers better grasp its scope and meaning.

The diagram below illustrates the main genres that literature encompasses:

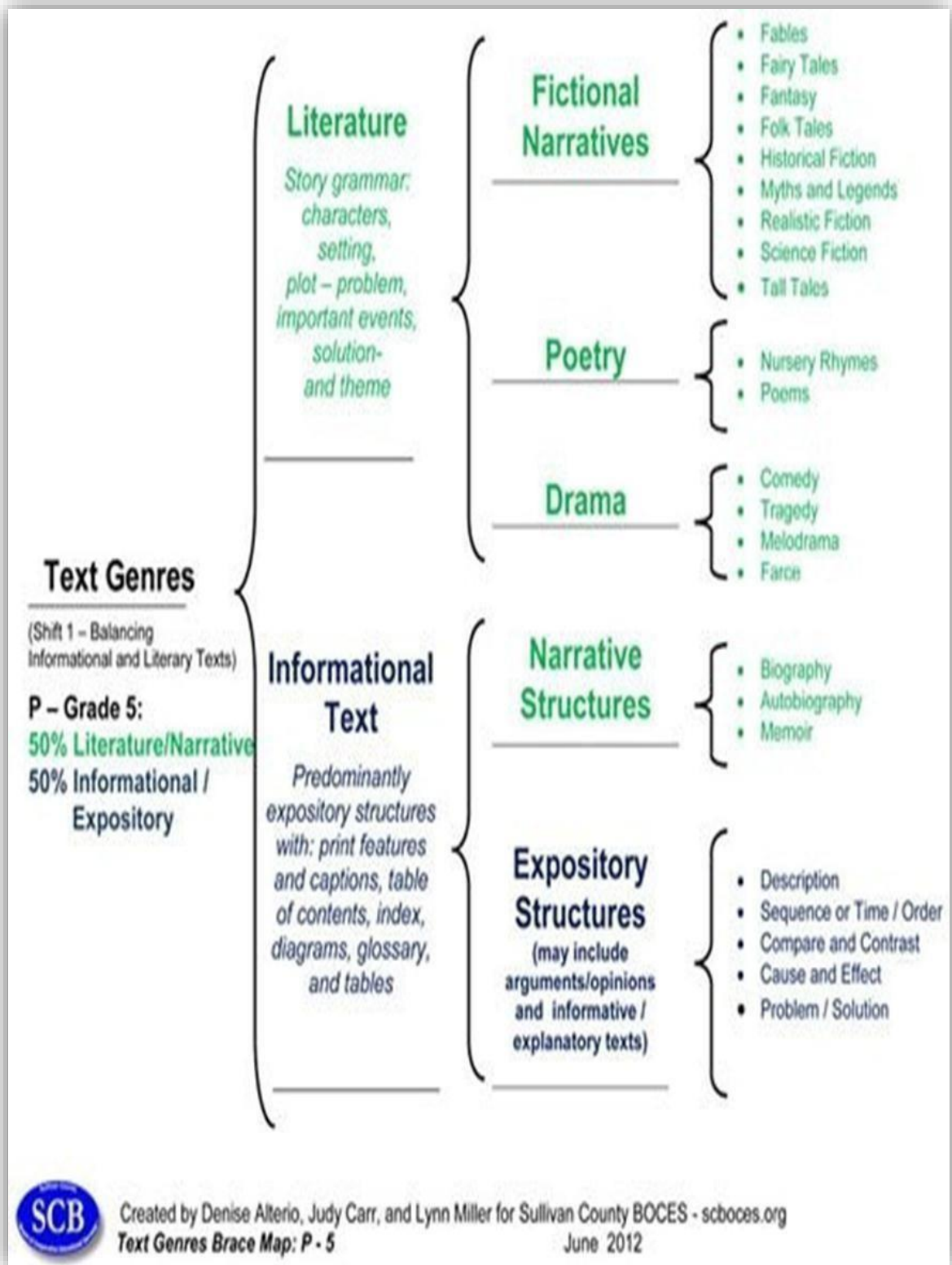


Diagram 1-1 Different Text Genres in Literature

Different types of texts indicate the richness of literature as it gives the writer the freedom to explore and express his feelings and mold them; however, he/she thinks best.

Afghani literature, both oral and written, serves as a powerful reflection of the country's complex history, diverse culture, and enduring struggles. Rooted in centuries of poetic tradition, particularly in Dari and Pashto, Afghan literary expression has long been a means of preserving identity, sharing wisdom, and resisting oppression. In recent decades, especially in the context of war, displacement, and social transformation, Afghani literature has evolved into a vital platform for exploring themes of trauma, gender inequality, exile, and resilience.

Historically, Afghan literature was dominated by poetry, with classical poets like Rumi, Khoshal Khan Khattak, and Rahman Baba shaping the literary landscape. Poetry was not only a form of artistic expression but also a vehicle for philosophical, spiritual, and political thought. However, the modern era has seen a shift toward prose, particularly the novel and memoir, as Afghan writers seek to document the lived experiences of their people in more direct and personal ways.

One of the most influential contemporary voices is Khaled Hosseini, whose novels have brought Afghan stories to a global readership. His debut novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003), explores themes of friendship, betrayal, and redemption against the backdrop of Afghanistan's political upheaval. His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), focuses on the lives of two Afghan women, Mariam and Laila, whose personal struggles reflect the broader oppression of women in Afghan society. Through these characters, Hosseini highlights the impact of war, patriarchy, and cultural expectations on women's lives, while also emphasizing their strength and solidarity.

Another key figure in modern Afghani literature is Atiq Rahimi, a French-Afghan writer and filmmaker. His novel *The Patience Stone* (Syngu  Sabour, 2008) offers a deeply introspective look at a woman caring for her comatose

husband during wartime. The novel, which won the prestigious Prix Goncourt, is notable for its minimalist style and psychological depth. Rahimi's work often explores the inner lives of his characters, using symbolism and sparse language to convey the emotional weight of conflict and repression.

Nadia Hashimi, an Afghan-American author, contributes to the literary conversation with a focus on women's rights and generational trauma. Her novel *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014) tells the parallel stories of two Afghan women—one in the early 20th century and one in the early 21st—who both challenge the limitations imposed on them by society. Hashimi's work is particularly important for its portrayal of *bacha posh*, a cultural practice in which girls are dressed and raised as boys to access freedoms otherwise denied them. Her novels blend fiction with real-world issues, offering both emotional depth and social commentary.

In the realm of non-fiction, Malalai Joya stands out as a courageous voice. Her memoir, *A Woman Among Warlords* (2009), recounts her experiences as one of the youngest and most outspoken female members of the Afghan parliament. Joya's writing is both a personal narrative and a political critique, exposing the corruption, violence, and misogyny that continue to plague Afghan governance. Her work is a testament to the power of literature as a tool for activism and truth-telling.

Together, these writers represent a new wave of Afghani literature, one that is deeply personal, politically engaged, and globally resonant. Their works not only document the harsh realities of life in Afghanistan but also celebrate the resilience, dignity, and humanity of its people. Through fiction, memoir, and poetry, Afghani literature continues to evolve, offering insight into a nation that has long been misunderstood and misrepresented.

In conclusion, Afghani literature is more than a reflection of cultural identity; it is a form of resistance, a record of history, and a voice for the voiceless. Writers like Khaled Hosseini, Atiq Rahimi, Nadia Hashimi, and Malalai Joya have expanded the boundaries of Afghan storytelling, bringing its richness and complexity to the world stage. As Afghanistan continues to face

political and social challenges, its literature remains a vital space for dialogue, healing, and hope.

1-3 Feminism:

The belief in gender equality is the principle that women should be granted the same rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and levels of respect as men in all areas of life, including education, employment, political participation, and personal freedom. It also refers to the broader movement and sets of actions aimed at challenging and changing the social, cultural, and institutional structures that have historically disadvantaged women. This includes advocating for equal pay, access to leadership roles, protection from gender-based violence, and the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices. Ultimately, gender equality seeks to create a society where individuals are not limited or judged based on their gender but are instead empowered to reach their full potential on equal terms.

Feminism is a dynamic and far-reaching movement that has grown to influence a wide range of disciplines. Among these, literature has been particularly shaped by feminist thought. Throughout history, many influential female writers have emerged, often overcoming significant societal barriers. In earlier centuries, women were frequently denied the opportunity to publish under their names. As a result, some adopted male pseudonyms to ensure their work would be taken seriously—George Eliot, for example, was the pen name of Mary Ann Evans, a brilliant novelist whose contributions to English literature remain highly regarded.

During the medieval and Enlightenment periods in Europe, early advocates for gender equality began to emerge, with Mary Wollstonecraft standing out as a key figure. An English writer and philosopher, she is best known for her influential work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she argued for women's right to education and intellectual development. Her ideas laid the groundwork for modern feminist theory and highlighted the essential role of education in achieving gender equality.

"Feminism is the radical notion that women are people."

Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler.

This sociopolitical and cultural movement seeks to secure equal rights and opportunities for women by addressing both legal protections and the social injustices they continue to face. Feminism challenges deeply rooted gender norms and seeks to create a more balanced and inclusive society. It calls attention to issues such as workplace discrimination, gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and unequal access to education and healthcare.

By highlighting these disparities, feminism not only advocates for women's rights but also promotes a broader vision of justice and equality for all. Literature, as a powerful medium of expression, has served as both a mirror and a catalyst for feminist ideals, giving voice to women's experiences and inspiring generations to push for change.

1-4 Culture vs Religion:

The ongoing debate over whether cultural heritage is shaped primarily by the dominant religion in each region remains far from settled. Scholars across disciplines like anthropology, sociology, history, and religious studies continue to explore the extent to which religious doctrines influence societal norms, traditions, and collective identity. This inquiry is particularly complex in regions where religion permeates nearly every aspect of daily life, such as in many parts of the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa. In these contexts, religion is not merely a private belief system but a foundational element of public life, law, education, and governance.

Afghanistan serves as a compelling case study in this discourse. The country's cultural heritage is deeply intertwined with Islam, which has historically shaped its legal codes, gender roles, educational practices, and social expectations. However, Afghanistan's persistent struggles with poverty, limited access to education, and gender inequality are often controversially attributed to the influence of Islam and its perceived rigidity. Critics argue that certain interpretations of Islamic law have contributed to the marginalization of women and the suppression of dissenting voices. Dina Mansour in her article *Women's Rights in Islamic Shari'a: Between Interpretation, Culture and Politics*, argues that while Islamic law originally aimed to elevate the status of women, cultural

and political biases in interpretation have led to persistent discrimination. She emphasizes that these interpretations often reflect local traditions and power structures more than religious doctrine itself. Yet, such interpretations risk oversimplifying a deeply multifaceted issue.

While religious beliefs undoubtedly shape cultural practices, they do not operate in a vacuum. They interact with a wide array of other factors, including historical legacies, colonial and post-colonial dynamics, political instability, foreign intervention, tribal structures, and economic underdevelopment. For instance, decades of conflict, including the Soviet invasion, civil war, Taliban rule, and international military interventions, have profoundly disrupted Afghanistan's social fabric and economic infrastructure. These events have arguably had as much if not more impact on the country's development trajectory as religious doctrine.

Moreover, religion itself is not monolithic. Within Islam, there exists a rich diversity of thought, jurisprudence, and cultural expression. Localized interpretations and practices often vary significantly, shaped by regional customs, historical experiences, and socio-political contexts. Thus, attributing Afghanistan's social and economic challenges solely to Islam overlooks the broader structural and geopolitical dynamics at play. It also risks reinforcing orientalist narratives that portray Islamic societies as inherently backward or resistant to progress.

The relationship between religion and cultural heritage remains a subject of ongoing inquiry. It demands a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach, one that recognizes the interplay between belief systems and the broader socio-political environment. Understanding this relationship requires moving beyond binary frameworks that pit religion against modernity or tradition against progress. Instead, it calls for an appreciation of how cultural heritage is continuously negotiated, contested, and redefined through the lived experiences of communities.

Culture itself is a complex and dynamic construct. It is defined as the behavior peculiar to Homo sapiens, encompassing both tangible and intangible

elements. These include language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies. Culture is not static; it evolves over time, influenced by internal developments and external interactions. It serves as both a repository of collective memory and a framework for interpreting the present and imagining the future.

Religion, on the other hand, has undergone significant conceptual evolution. In antiquity, it did not refer to a distinct social category but was embedded in broader cosmological and political systems. Today, religion encompasses both major world faiths such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism and localized belief systems that may not fit neatly into institutional frameworks. It functions as a source of moral guidance, social cohesion, and existential meaning, while also serving as a marker of identity and a site of political contestation.

In sum, the shaping of cultural heritage is a multidimensional process in which religion plays a vital but not exclusive role. To fully grasp this process, scholars and observers must consider the intricate web of historical, political, economic, and social forces that interact with religious belief. Only through such a holistic lens can we begin to understand the true complexity of cultural identity in regions like Afghanistan and beyond.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has emphasized that genuine and lasting progress in women's rights cannot be achieved while harmful traditional practices continue to violate the dignity and fundamental freedoms of women and girls. Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights at UNAMA, highlighted this issue during a press briefing in Kabul, urging religious leaders to take an active role in challenging and eliminating such practices.

According to the report, these harmful customs are further reinforced by the Afghan government's limited capacity to enforce protections for women. It calls for the urgent and comprehensive implementation of the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW), which criminalizes a range of abusive practices, including the exchange of women in marriage transactions and using girls to settle disputes.

The EVAW law also prohibits forced and underage marriages, the isolation of

women, coercion into self-immolation, and the denial of access to education, employment, and healthcare. It outlines preventive responsibilities for seven government ministries to ensure these protections are upheld.

Ms. Gagnon stressed the importance of raising public awareness about the EAW law and ensuring its consistent enforcement. She noted that Afghan police and judicial authorities require significantly more training, oversight, and support from national institutions to apply the law effectively.

UNAMA's findings revealed that many law enforcement officials are either unaware of the EAW law or unwilling to enforce it. This lack of enforcement contributes to the persistence of harmful practices. Interviews with Afghan citizens indicated that authorities often ignore reports of violence against women or cases of child marriage, dismissing them as private family matters, while simultaneously prosecuting women for violating social norms.

This contradiction is evident in the high number of women imprisoned for so-called "moral crimes." The report explains that when women and girls are unable to escape abuse due to social or cultural constraints, they may flee their homes.

Although fleeing is not a criminal offense, many are arrested and charged with intending to commit zina (extramarital sex), a serious accusation under Afghan law. The report also highlights the devastating consequences of child marriage, which include long-term harm to girls' health, education, and overall well-being. Afghanistan continues to have one of the highest maternal mortality rates globally, with many deaths occurring among girls married before the age of 16. One of the most tragic outcomes of these practices is self-immolation, where women set themselves on fire as a desperate act to escape violence or express their suffering.

To address these issues, the report recommends that the Afghan government, including then-President Hamid Karzai, fully enforce the EAW law and immediately release women and girls imprisoned for fleeing abuse. It also urges courts and prosecutors to apply the law consistently and calls on police to investigate and prosecute all reports of harmful practices.

Furthermore, the report encourages religious leaders, in collaboration with the Ministries of Hajj and Religious Affairs and Women's Affairs, to develop

educational programs for imams, mullahs, and religious teachers. These programs should focus on women's rights, the EVAW law, and the importance of speaking out against practices that contradict Islamic principles.

1-5 Summary of the Novel

In a small town in Afghanistan called Herat a harami girl called Mariam was born to an epileptic mother called Nana and Jalil a businessman who has a cinema the father refused to recognize the illegitimate girl therefore he distances them away from his family.

Nana believes in typical gender roles women should stay at home and learn how to take care of their husbands.

There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school . . . Only one skill. And it's this: tahamul. Endure. . . It's our lot in life, Mariam. Women like us. We endure. It's all we have. Do you understand? Besides, they'll laugh at you in school. They will. They'll call you harami. They'll say the most terrible things about you. I won't have it. . . There is nothing out there for her. Nothing but rejection and heartache. (Hosseini 17–18).

Jalil used to visit Mariam weekly telling her stories about the world beyond the river, he made a promise to take her to watch Pinocchio on her 15th birthday, yet he shut the door in her face and kicked her out only to find out when she returned home that her mother committed suicide thus Jalil was obliged to take her in but his wives convinced him to have her wed to a shoemaker by the name of Rasheed was nothing but a childbearing tool to replace the child Rasheed once lost yet when she failed that marriage became her new jail.

On the opposite side of the street, Leila grew up amid the turmoil and devastation of war. Her life, marked by loss and instability, found a fleeting moment of solace in her deep affection for Tariq, a boy she loved dearly. Their bond offered her a rare sense of comfort and hope. However, their relationship took

a dramatic turn when Leila became pregnant with Tariq's child. Before they could face the consequences together, Tariq and his family fled the country, leaving Leila behind to navigate the harsh realities of her situation alone.

Left vulnerable and desperate, Leila became an easy target for Rasheed, a much older man who saw her predicament as an opportunity. Under the guise of offering protection and stability, Rasheed manipulated Leila into marrying him, using her pregnancy as leverage to control and shame her. In time, Leila gave birth to a daughter, Aziza, and later had a son, Zalmai, with Rasheed. Despite the appearance of a family, her life was marked by emotional and physical abuse, as Rasheed's true nature became increasingly oppressive.

Years passed, and just when Leila had resigned herself to a life of hardship, Tariq unexpectedly returned. His reappearance shattered the fragile illusion Rasheed had built. Overcome with jealousy and rage, Rasheed's treatment of Leila turned even more violent and cruel. The situation escalated to a breaking point, and in a desperate act of protection and solidarity, Mariam Rasheed's first wife and Leila's closest ally intervened. In a moment of courage and sacrifice, Mariam struck Rasheed with a shovel, ending his life to save Leila from further torment.

Mariam was convicted of murder and ultimately executed by the Taliban. Meanwhile, Laila escaped the country with Tariq, seeking refuge in Pakistan. After the U.S. invasion, Laila made the decision to return to Kabul. On her way, she stopped in Herat, where she discovered a box containing letters and Mariam's portion of her father's inheritance. Laila used the money to establish an orphanage and took up a position as a schoolteacher.

In the end, Laila is expecting another child with Tariq, holding onto the hope that they will finally find their happily ever after.

1-6 Khaled Hosseini Biography:

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American author born on March 4, 1965, is widely recognized for his evocative portrayals of Afghanistan, particularly in his debut novel *The Kite Runner* (2003).

Hosseini spent his early years in Kabul, where his father served as a diplomat and his mother worked as a high school teacher. In 1976, the family relocated to Paris due to his father's diplomatic assignment. However, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, they were unable to return home and were granted political asylum in the United States, eventually settling in California.

Reflecting on that period, Hosseini recalled the violence of the communist coup, which was far more brutal than the 1973 coup. Many individuals connected to the former regime or royal family were imprisoned, executed, or disappeared, and the atmosphere in Kabul became one of fear and repression.

Hosseini pursued higher education in the U.S., earning a biology degree from Santa Clara University before enrolling in medical school at the University of California, San Diego. He completed his medical degree in 1993 and began practicing as an internist in 1996.

In 2001, while still working as a physician, Hosseini began writing *The Kite Runner*, often waking up at 4 a.m. to write before heading to work. The novel follows Amir, a writer living in California who reflects on his privileged childhood in 1970s Kabul and his complex friendship with Hassan, the son of his family's servant. Though some critics found the novel melodramatic, it was widely praised for its emotional depth and storytelling. It gained popularity through word of mouth, was translated into over 30 languages, and was adapted into both a film and a stage play in 2007.

Encouraged by the success of *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini left medicine in 2004 to focus on writing full-time. The novel's impact also brought attention to the Afghan refugee crisis, leading to his appointment as a goodwill envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2006.

His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), was inspired by his 2003 visit to Afghanistan, where he was struck by the sight of women in burkas. The novel

continues his exploration of Afghan society, this time through the lens of two women, Mariam and Laila, who become co-wives of an abusive man. The story captures the dramatic political and social changes in Afghanistan and highlights the resilience of women under oppression.

Published in 2013, *And the Mountains Echoed* is Khaled Hosseini's third novel and a deeply layered exploration of family, sacrifice, and the far-reaching consequences of personal choices. Unlike his previous works, which focused on a central pair of characters, this novel adopts a broader narrative structure, weaving together multiple perspectives across different countries and generations. The story begins in 1952 in a small Afghan village, where a poor laborer named Saboor makes the heartbreaking decision to sell his young daughter, Pari, to a wealthy couple in Kabul. This act of sacrifice, intended to secure a better future for his family, sets off a ripple effect that echoes through the lives of many characters over the next five decades.

At the heart of the novel is the bond between Pari and her older brother Abdullah, whose deep love for his sister is shattered by their forced separation. As the narrative unfolds, readers are introduced to a diverse cast of characters ranging from Afghan villagers to expatriates in Paris and aid workers in Greece each connected in some way to the original act of separation. Through these interwoven stories, Hosseini explores themes of memory, identity, and the enduring impact of loss and longing.

One of the novel's most prominent themes is interconnectedness—how the lives of strangers can be linked by a single event, and how the consequences of one decision can span continents and generations. Other central themes include family in its many forms, compassion versus self-interest, and the struggles between wealth and poverty.

And the Mountains Echoed was praised for its ambitious narrative scope and emotional depth. While some critics noted that the fragmented structure made it less cohesive than Hosseini's earlier novels, many applauded his ability to capture the

complexity of human relationships and the resilience of the human spirit. The novel further cemented Hosseini's reputation as a master storyteller with a unique voice rooted in Afghan history and culture.

1.7 Conclusion

The literary review of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reveals a poignant and deeply human portrayal of Afghan women's lives under the weight of patriarchy, war, and cultural expectations. Through the intersecting stories of Mariam and Laila, Hosseini crafts a narrative that not only exposes the systemic oppression faced by women but also highlights their resilience, solidarity, and capacity for love and sacrifice. The novel serves as both a social critique and a tribute to the strength of Afghan women, offering readers a lens into the emotional and psychological landscapes shaped by decades of conflict and gender-based injustice. Ultimately, the book stands as a powerful literary testament to the enduring struggle for dignity and justice in a society marked by deep-rooted inequality.

**CHAPTER TWO:
The Analysis of A
Thousand Splendid
Suns**

2-1 Introduction

Numerous literary analyses have explored *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, delving into the intricate layers of the narrative and highlighting the subtle yet powerful details that convey the emotional depth and psychological complexity of the characters. These analyses often emphasize how Khaled Hosseini masterfully uses imagery, symbolism, and narrative structure to reflect the inner lives of Mariam and Laila, as well as to express his own commentary on themes such as gender inequality, resilience, and the impact of war. Through these nuanced elements, both the characters' emotions and the author's intentions are vividly brought to life, enriching the reader's understanding of the story's profound human truths.

2-2 An Analysis of the Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns

Hosseini employed a distinctive and compelling narrative approach in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, skillfully weaving together unexpected plot twists, a provocative and politically charged setting, and a cast of deeply complex male and female characters. These elements not only heighten the emotional intensity of the story but also serve to immerse the reader in the harsh realities of life in Afghanistan during decades of conflict. The unpredictability of the plot keeps the narrative engaging and emotionally resonant, while the richly drawn characters each shaped by personal trauma, cultural expectations, and shifting political landscapes offer a multifaceted exploration of human resilience, love, and sacrifice. This thoughtful combination of storytelling techniques is what makes the novel stand out as both a literary achievement and a poignant social commentary.

2-2-1 Setting

The writer paid close attention to the setting in which the story took place (Afghanistan) specifically the city of Herat & Kabul, places that held the stories of the novel's characters during several eras from the soviet invasion to the Taliban ruling the events kept developing from 1958.

2-2-2 The Main Characters

Leila In Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam and Laila represent two contrasting yet intertwined realities of womanhood in war-torn Afghanistan. Though born into vastly different circumstances, their lives converge in a shared struggle against oppression, ultimately revealing the resilience and sacrifice that define their bond.

Mariam, labeled a harami an illegitimate child is the daughter of Nana, an epileptic maid, and Jalil, a wealthy businessman who denies her legitimacy under the pressure of his wives. Her early life is marked by rejection and shame, culminating in her forced marriage to Rasheed, a cruel and volatile man. Mariam's existence is shaped by endurance and quiet suffering, a reflection of the societal scorn she bears from birth.

In contrast, Laila is born into a progressive household, the daughter of educated parents who value learning and hope. Her life takes a tragic turn when a rocket kills her family, and she is left pregnant with Tariq's child. To avoid societal condemnation, she marries Rasheed, becoming his second wife. Despite her more privileged beginnings, Laila too becomes a victim of Rasheed's brutality, revealing how even the most promising lives can be derailed by war and patriarchy.

The climax of the novel sees Mariam committing the ultimate act of sacrifice killing Rasheed to save Laila from his violence. This act of courage costs Mariam her life, as she is executed under Taliban rule. Yet, her death paves the way for Laila's freedom. Laila escapes with Tariq and their children to Pakistan, seeking refuge and a chance at a new life, while carrying Mariam's memory as a symbol of strength and love.

Through Mariam and Laila, Hosseini portrays two facets of the same reality one shaped by shame and silence, the other by hope and resistance. Together, their stories form a powerful narrative of endurance, sacrifice, and the unbreakable bond between women.

2-2-3 The Plot

The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* serves as a time capsule, capturing the experiences of different generations in Kabul. The narrative begins in 1974, when 15-year-old Mariam is left to confront her harsh destiny with the cruel shoemaker Rasheed, following her mother Nana's suicide and her father Jalil's rejection.

The whole story is a complex narrative in which concepts like sacrifice and oppression are heavily represented from Rasheed the abusive husband to Mariam who killed him eventually to save Leila these women were the splendid suns of Kabul and the hope for future generations.

2-3 Feminist Themes in A Thousand Splendid Suns

Khaled Hosseini in his novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reported the truth about the everyday life of an ordinary woman in Afghanistan through his powerful female characters Mariam and Leila.

Hosseini showed a deep connection with his motherland by describing the country's situation in different eras He successfully wins the compassion of the reader as he splashes the harsh reality of womanhood under the umbrella of Afghan society from the very beginning of the novel.

Characters like Nana Mariam Leila and Aziza were perfect examples of abuse based on gender as each of these women lived different lives during different times yet suffering and torture brought them together.

2-3-1 Nana from a Maid to a Mistress

Nana (Mariam's mother) was the housekeeper for Jalil they had an affair, and she ended up pregnant with an illegitimate child, Mariam both Nana's father and Jalil refused to take her and the child so Jalil to protect his reputation thought it best to expel her to a remote location far away from people's eyes.

Nana was oppressed in many forms at 15 she was going to get married but the wedding was called off due to her sickness the poor little girl had epilepsy yet they treated her as if she was possessed by a devil later on, she worked as a maid in Jalil's house he took advantage of her and end up getting her pregnant and dismissing the child.

She raised Mariam warning her about men based on her traumatic past experiences “Like a compass needle that always points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always, you remember that Mariam... ‘and believe me’ Nana said, ‘it was a relief to your father having me out of sight’ (p.07).

2-3-2 Mariam the Harami Girl

Mariam’s life began under the shadow of shame and secrecy. Born as the illegitimate daughter of Jalil, a wealthy businessman, and Nana, a housemaid, Mariam was never granted the dignity of legitimacy. From her earliest days, she was marked by the consequences of a relationship that society deemed unacceptable. Jalil, though he visited her weekly, never acknowledged her publicly.

To him, Mariam was a living reminder of a mistake an error he could not erase but also could not fully embrace. His affection was limited, conditional, and ultimately hollow. He offered her crumbs of attention, but never the full recognition or love that a father should provide.

Nana, Mariam’s mother, was a deeply bitter and broken woman. Her harshness toward Mariam was not born of malice alone, but of deep disappointment and unfulfilled dreams. She had once hoped to be Jalil’s wife, to be accepted into his world of wealth and respectability. Instead, she was cast aside, left to raise their daughter in isolation. Mariam, in Nana’s eyes, became both a burden and a symbol of lost hope. She projected her pain onto Mariam, often blaming her for her own misfortunes. Yet, paradoxically, Mariam was also Nana’s only companion, her only connection to the man she once loved. When Mariam, driven by a child’s longing for acceptance, dared to visit Jalil’s home, the betrayal was too much for Nana to bear. Her suicide was not just an act of despair, but a final, tragic expression of her

emotional dependence on both Jalil and Mariam.

After Nana's death, Mariam's life took a darker turn. Jalil, unwilling to take responsibility for her, arranged her marriage to Rasheed, a much older shoemaker from Kabul. This decision was not made out of concern for Mariam's well-being, but rather to rid himself of a problem. Mariam, still a teenager, was thrust into a marriage that quickly became a prison. Rasheed, at first seemingly kind, soon revealed his true nature. He was controlling, abusive, and emotionally distant. His affection was conditional—based solely on Mariam's ability to bear him a son to replace the one he had lost. When Mariam suffered multiple miscarriages, Rasheed's disappointment turned to cruelty. He saw her not as a partner, but as a failed investment, a woman who could not fulfill the role he had assigned her.

Mariam's suffering in Rasheed's home was both physical and psychological. She endured beatings, verbal abuse, and isolation. Her identity was stripped away, her voice silenced. Yet, despite the relentless hardship, Mariam's spirit endured. Her resilience, though often quiet and unseen, was profound. She found moments of strength in the smallest acts of defiance, in the endurance of pain, and later, in the bonds she formed with others who shared her suffering.

Mariam's story is a powerful exploration of the ways in which women's lives can be shaped—and often shattered—by the decisions of men and the constraints of a patriarchal society. She was born into rejection, raised in bitterness, and married into abuse. Yet, her life is not merely a tale of victimhood. It is also a testament to the quiet strength that can exist even in the most oppressive circumstances. Mariam's journey is heartbreaking, but it is also deeply human—a reminder of the resilience that can exist even in the face of relentless adversity.

2-3-3 Leila the Never Lasting Happiness

In Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the character of Laila represents a powerful narrative of hope, endurance, and transformation amid the

chaos of war-torn Afghanistan. Her story, marked by both privilege and profound suffering, offers a compelling contrast to that of Mariam, the novel's other central female character. While Mariam's life is shaped by rejection and hardship from the beginning, Laila's early years are filled with love, education, and the promise of a brighter future.

Laila is born into a progressive family in Kabul. Her father, Hakim, is a schoolteacher who values education and encourages Laila to pursue her studies, believing that women have just as much right to knowledge and opportunity as men. Her mother, though emotionally distant due to the loss of her sons in the war, still provides a home where Laila is cared for. This relatively stable and nurturing environment sets Laila apart from many other Afghan girls of her time, including Mariam, who grows up in isolation and shame.

Laila's life takes a dramatic turn when a rocket strike kills her parents during the civil war in Kabul. Orphaned and alone, she is taken in by Rasheed and Mariam. At this point, Laila is already carrying the child of her childhood friend and beloved neighbor, Tariq, who had fled the country with his family due to the worsening political situation. Believing Tariq to be dead, and with no other options for survival, Laila agrees to marry Rasheed. Rasheed, aware of her pregnancy, uses the situation to his advantage, presenting himself as a savior while seeking a young, attractive wife to bear him a son.

Laila gives birth to a daughter, Aziza, whom Rasheed initially accepts as his own. However, his disappointment becomes evident when he realizes the child is a girl. Later, Laila gives birth to a son, Zalmai, fulfilling Rasheed's long-held desire for a male heir. Yet, the arrival of Zalmai marks a turning point in Laila's marriage.

Rasheed becomes increasingly abusive, both physically and emotionally, asserting control over Laila and Mariam through violence and intimidation. His cruelty escalates to the point where he forces Laila to send Aziza to an orphanage, unable to provide for her due to the family's financial struggles.

Despite the trauma and abuse she endures, Laila remains a devoted and loving mother. Her bond with Aziza is especially strong, and she risks her safety to visit her

daughter at the orphanage whenever possible. Laila's resilience is also evident in her evolving relationship with Mariam. What begins as a tense and competitive dynamic gradually transforms into a deep and supportive friendship. Together, they find strength in one another, forming a surrogate family that helps them survive Rasheed's torture.

The return of Tariq later in the novel brings a glimmer of hope and redemption. Laila learns that Rasheed had lied about Tariq's death to manipulate her into marriage. Reunited with her true love, Laila eventually escapes Rasheed's control after a tragic but liberating act by Mariam, who sacrifices herself to ensure Laila's freedom. Laila's journey comes full circle as she leaves Kabul with Tariq and her children, later returning to help rebuild the city and contribute to its future.

In conclusion, Laila's story in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a testament to the strength and resilience of Afghan women. Her experiences reflect the broader struggles faced by women in a patriarchal and war-torn society, yet her character also embodies hope, love, and the possibility of change. Through Laila, Hosseini illustrates that even in the darkest of circumstances, the human spirit can endure and triumph.

2-3-4 Aziza the Proof of Leila's Sin

Aziza, the illegitimate daughter of Laila and Tariq, is one of the most emotionally compelling characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Born into a world of secrecy and hardship, she spends her early years under the roof of Rasheed, who falsely believes or pretends to believe that she is his biological daughter. However, Rasheed's resentment toward Aziza is evident from the beginning. Still mourning the loss of his first son, he projects his disappointment and bitterness onto Aziza, largely because she is a girl and a constant reminder of his unfulfilled desire for a male heir. His coldness toward her is not just emotional but also material, as he withholds affection, attention, and necessities, treating her as a burden rather than a child.

Aziza's life is further complicated by the abusive environment in which she is

raised. Both she and her mother, Laila, endure daily mistreatment at the hands of Rasheed, whose temper and violence escalate as the family's financial situation worsens. The abuse reaches a heartbreaking climax when Rasheed, unable to provide for the family, forces Laila to place Aziza in an orphanage. This separation is deeply traumatic for both mother and daughter, as Aziza is suddenly removed from the only home she has ever known and placed in an institution where conditions are harsh and impersonal. Despite this, Laila risks her safety to visit Aziza as often as she can, reaffirming the deep bond between them.

What makes Aziza's character particularly remarkable is her emotional resilience. Despite the neglect and instability, she experiences, she remains kind, gentle, and hopeful. This strength of character can be largely attributed to the love and care she receives from her mother, Laila, and her adoptive aunt, Mariam. Both women, though victims of their own circumstances, go to great lengths to protect and nurture Aziza. Mariam, in particular, forms a close and tender relationship with the child, offering her the warmth and stability that Rasheed denies. Through their guidance, Aziza learns compassion, patience, and the value of inner strength.

In many ways, Aziza symbolizes the possibility of a better future. She represents the next generation of Afghan women—those who, despite being born into a society marked by conflict and patriarchy, may grow up with the tools to break the cycle of oppression. Her survival and emotional growth, even in the face of adversity, reflect the enduring hope that lies at the heart of the novel.

2-4 Marginalization in the Novel

One of the core aspects of the novel since many characters experienced it in different degrees is marginalization, the concept is based on giving less importance to a character while giving the absolute power to define the destiny of other characters mainly females.

Gender stereotypes related to women limit their access to the public sphere mainly education which slows down their advancement in life thus women are overlooked and marginalized due to their lack of experience or simply because they do not perform a huge role outside the domestic zone.

Marginalization based on gender is a common theme in underdeveloped societies like Afghanistan where women find themselves being treated as inferiors to men in their nation because of the heavy reliance on the patriarchal traditions which had been going on for generations.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the main female characters experienced marginalization their whole life.

Nana was denied from having an appropriate workplace to earn money to live in just because she was uneducated due to the financial situation of her very poor family she had to work as a housekeeper to sustain life essentials for them the job itself is considered a women like occupation which is just a further illustration of how the patriarchy makes it even harder for women to live a decent life without relying on males.

Nana had been one of the housekeepers. (Hosseini 6)

The acts of injustice towards women in the workplace are caused by a patriarchal culture that is deeply rooted in society. The patriarchal culture encourages women to not work outside the home, and they better take care of the household, while the ones who have to work outside the home are men from the family members. Women who work outside the home would be thought of as not normal by society. If there are women who do paid work, they have to balance their time between work and taking care of the house and family (UN DESA, 2010, p. IX).

She became even more marginalized when she got pregnant with Mariam after having an affair with Jalil her boss she thought the kid she was carrying would help her to gain an identity and change her social status yet to hide that child Jalil had fired her and send them both to live in an isolated place called Gul Daman.

Jalil didn't have the dil either, Nana said, to do the honorable thing ... The next day, he had made her gather her few things from the servants' quarters, where she'd been living, and sent her off. (Hosseini 7)

Nana's father disowned her after finding out she was pregnant with an illegitimate baby, so Nana had no choice but to follow Jalil's orders as she was left with no job and no family.

In this equation what concerned Jalil the most was his reputation; he wasn't ready to take responsibility for his actions, so Nana was left alone to manage everything including her child's birth.

She said that Jalil hadn't bothered to summon a doctor or even a midwife ... She lay all alone on the kolba's floor, a knife by her side, sweat drenching her body. (Hosseini 11)

The acts of marginalization Nana faced made her a bitter unhappy woman she loved her daughter Mariam yet deep down she couldn't help but think about how her life could be easier if she didn't have her.

Mariam the Harami child experienced marginalization from both of her parents, her father Jalil Khan refused to accept her as a daughter in the public's eyes that's why he kept her away as the secret of his sin, and her mother refused to let her explore better options in life like education.

“What's the sense of schooling a girl like you? ... you'll learn nothing of value in those schools. There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school...” (Hosseini 20)

Keeping Mariam uneducated one way or another set her up to have the same fate as her mother as when she turned fifteen her father married her off to a much older shoemaker named Rasheed.

Her marriage to Rasheed marked the beginning of a new chapter sufferance for her as he abused her in every way possible because she couldn't bear his long-awaited son.

Marginalization against women isn't external always sometimes it is internal

for example after everything Mariam went through, she completely lost her confidence.

“I’m sorry, Laila Jo. I am not smart like you. He asked so many questions, I didn't know the answers. I’m sorry.” (Hosseini 285)

This dialogue is when Mariam and Leila tried to run away it demonstrates how Mariam looked down on herself compared to Leila because she’s uneducated and because deep down she carries the trauma of being the illegitimate child who was rejected by her parents and the failing wife who couldn’t get pregnant.

2-5 Patriarchy in the Novel

The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* captures the evolving condition of women's rights under successive political regimes, from the Soviet invasion to the rise of the Taliban. Each power shift brought significant changes to women's daily lives—freedoms were granted, only to be later revoked— intensifying their struggle for dignity, education, and autonomy in a society where political instability often dictated personal destiny.

Kabul serves as a powerful backdrop in the novel, illustrating the varying status of women. When Mariam moves from Herat to Kabul, she is astonished by the liberties women enjoy—working, walking freely, and dressing as they choose. The city embraced diversity, welcoming people regardless of their background or beliefs.

During this era, women gained notable access to education and professional roles under Soviet influence. This progress is reflected in Laila’s father’s hopeful words: "It's a good time to be a woman in Afghanistan." (p.135), capturing a fleeting moment of optimism before the nation's political climate shifted once again.

As Amnesty International notes, "The 20th Century had seen relatively steady progression for women's rights in Afghanistan... But during coups and Soviet occupation in the 1970s, through civil conflict between Mujahideen groups and government forces in the '80s and '90s, and then under Taliban rule, women in

Afghanistan had their rights increasingly rolled back.”

The Soviet-backed government introduced reforms aimed at modernizing women’s roles—ensuring equal employment rights, mandating girls’ education, making the hijab and burqa optional, and raising the legal marriage age to sixteen. Though controversial, these measures marked a significant effort to challenge traditional gender roles and promote female autonomy in a patriarchal society.

By 1988, women held prominent positions in Afghan society—comprising 40% of doctors and 60% of Kabul University’s teaching staff. Around 440,000 girls were enrolled in educational institutions, with an additional 80,000 participating in literacy programs.

Despite these advancements in urban centers during the communist era, rural areas clung to conservative traditions and rigid gender roles—explaining Mariam’s surprise at the freedoms women enjoyed in Kabul.

Kabul remained a progressive city until 1996 when the Taliban—a group of former mujahideen trained in Pakistan during the civil war—captured the capital. Their rule marked a devastating regression for women, who were confined to their homes, denied education and employment, and forbidden from appearing in public without a burqa and a male guardian. This era is widely regarded as one of the most egregious human rights crises for women in modern history.

Those who defied these restrictions faced severe punishment. This is powerfully depicted in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where Laila is repeatedly beaten for visiting the orphanage where her daughter Aziza was placed—simply because she was unaccompanied by a man. These fictional events mirror the real experiences of countless Afghan women, as documented by Human Rights Watch and the United Nations, both of which have described the Taliban’s policies as a form of “gender apartheid.”

2-6 Social Norms and Religion

Religion is one of the essential pillars on which any country's stability is built, it can strongly influence the cultural landscape leading to a strong association

between religious beliefs and social norms therefore the coherence between members of society depends on the individual interpretation of the religious manuscript. Thus, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* explores the issue of religious oppression within traditional societies. Given its engagement with sensitive and controversial themes, the novel sparked a range of reactions from both readers and literary critics.

In her literary critique, Dr. Mary Geraldine Gunaban highlights the novel's faithful depiction of Afghanistan's historical and cultural landscape, especially the hardships endured by women throughout years of conflict. She asserts that the narrative transcends its Afghan setting, resonating with the broader, global experiences of women living under patriarchal systems. The novel is also commended for its emotionally rich characters and its portrayal of unconventional relationships.

Conversely, a critical perspective is offered by Abdullah Dagamseh in his article published in CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, titled "Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a Child-Rescue and Neo-Orientalist Narrative." Dagamseh contends that although the novel seems to champion Afghan women's rights, it subtly reinforces Western dominance by depicting Afghan society as fundamentally oppressive and in need of Western salvation.

Some readers were extremely unsatisfied with the bad image the novel gave about Islam and Muslims as to them it was nothing, but Western propaganda aims to tarnish the reputation of Sharia and Islamic countries. To understand the perspective the novel offered it is important to be aware of the history of the area especially the emergence of religious extremism represented by the Taliban group during the 90's.

A Thousand Splendid Suns reported the horrors of war that took place in Afghanistan from the '70s till the early 2000s and the mental load citizens had to burden in the presence of different ideologies. The country was split by poverty, terrorism, and war.

Hosseini did not try to make any links between religion and the reality of Afghanistan as religion should not be blamed for the misunderstanding of people

who try to justify their interest at the cost of other's suffering.

The author strongly criticizes the manipulation of religion to legitimize the oppression of women, using vivid and powerful descriptions to expose the suffering many endure under patriarchal rule. This is especially evident in the character of Mariam, who experiences severe male dominance and abuse during her marriage to Rasheed.

“CHEW!” he bellowed. A gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face.

Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked.

. Then he was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out peddles, blood, and fragments of two broken molars. (Hosseini 104)

Another social norm that was common in Afghanistan is men preferring having sons over daughters if the wife delivers a boy, she would be ranked higher in society and her husband would be so happy and spoil her while if she had a daughter, he would be so angry even though it is out of her control this case was represented in the novel when Leila gave birth to her daughter Aziza Rasheed oppressed them and trolled Leila until she gave up on her daughter and leave her at the orphanage. When she gave birth to Zalmai Rasheed finally reached his goal of substituting his dead son, he felt relieved that his efforts to groom Leila did not go in vain.

This social belief has no roots in Islam as it was a former practice in Arabic tribes to bury girls alive yet when Islam came it became forbidden.

***"And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief... Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide."* Surah An-Nahl (16:58–59)**

God in the holy Quran mentioned that there is no difference between men and women but piety is the only thing that determines One's value in the hands of God.

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13)

Although *A Thousand Splendid Suns* received some criticism, many readers and literary critics were deeply moved by the novel's detailed portrayal of the harsh realities faced by its female protagonists, Mariam and Laila, and the resilience they showed through their struggles.

In her article, Bindu Ann Philip claimed that **"Anyone with a conscience can't overlook this poignant tale of feminine struggle... Mariam gained her freedom, and power and became self-sufficient only when she struck her husband."**

Her article praised the feminist view the novel provides and emphasizes on women's empowerment especially in traditional societies.

2.7 Social Imperialism:

Social imperialism refers to the use of social structures, cultural dominance, and ideological control to maintain power over a population. In Afghanistan, this phenomenon has been deeply intertwined with foreign interventions and politics.

Upheavals, and rigid societal norms. Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* provides a poignant exploration of how social-imperialism has shaped Afghan society, particularly through the oppression of women and the manipulation of cultural identity.

Afghanistan has endured multiple waves of foreign intervention, from the Soviet invasion in 1979 to the U.S. presence post-2001. Each occupying force imposed its ideological framework, influencing Afghan society in ways that extended beyond military control. The Soviet Union, for instance, attempted to modernize Afghanistan by promoting secularism and gender equality, but this was met with resistance from traditionalists. The Taliban, on the other hand, enforced

a strict interpretation of Islamic law, further deepening social imperialism by restricting women's rights and controlling education.

According to Helena Zeweri's study, *Between Imperial Rule and Sovereignty: Rethinking Afghanistan Studies*, foreign interventions have historically shaped Afghanistan's social structures, often reinforcing existing inequalities rather than dismantling them. Zeweri argues that imperial geopolitical agendas have influenced knowledge production about Afghanistan, affecting both policy decisions and public perceptions.

Hosseini's novel vividly illustrates the effects of social imperialism through the lives of Mariam and Laila, two Afghan women who endure systemic oppression. The Taliban's rule is depicted as a form of social imperialism, where women are denied education, employment, and basic freedoms. One of the most striking quotes from the novel encapsulates this reality:

"Like a compass needle that always points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman."

2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, analyzing *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through a feminist lens reveals the profound impact of patriarchal oppression on Afghan women's lives, while also celebrating their resilience, agency, and solidarity. Khaled Hosseini's portrayal of Mariam and Laila transcends victimhood, illustrating how women navigate, resist, and ultimately challenge the structures that seek to silence them. The novel critiques the deeply entrenched gender inequalities in Afghan society, exposing how cultural, legal, and familial systems perpetuate female subjugation. Yet, it also offers a powerful narrative of empowerment, where female bonds become a source of strength and transformation. Through this feminist reading, the novel emerges not only as a story of suffering but as a testament to the enduring spirit and resistance of women in the face of systemic injustice.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This research paper has illuminated the harsh living conditions endured by Afghan women, ranging from poverty and conflict to systemic gender discrimination. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the novel powerfully depicts the grim reality of those silenced due to their gender or social class, in a society where the wealthy wield control and the poor face relentless oppression, revealing how deeply rooted cultural norms and political instability have shaped the lives of generations of women striving for dignity, voice, and freedom.

Men overpowering women and dictating their fate from a feminist perspective had been one of the main aims of this research in addition to covering the emergence of culture and religion which has been misunderstood on purpose by some groups to justify their desires and cruelty towards a certain group of people mainly women.

Thus, the novel indeed represents the deteriorating reality of human rights and female aggression under a patriarchal system fueled by religious fallacies and greed.

Through the story of one girl, we experienced a fraction of what thousands of Afghan women go through the emotional impact the novel left on readers was a strong tool to advocate for women's rights.

Every research study has its limitations, and this paper is no exception. Certain aspects remain unexplored, particularly regarding the pursuit of freedom in a society perpetually confined, and the ongoing struggle of women to earn respect and recognition for future generations. As Khaled Hosseini poignantly states in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, 'marriage can wait, education cannot,' highlighting the urgency of empowerment through learning.

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