

PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE EXPERIENCES IN KHALED HOSSEINE'S A THOUSAND
SPLENDID SUNS**Mamatova Gulshodaxon Sharabiddinovna**

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Annotatsiya. Ushbu ilmiy maqolada patriarxal ijtimoiy tuzilma doirasida ayollarning mavqeini, xususan, Xolid Husayniyning "A Thousand Splendid Suns" romani doirasida tahlil qilinadi. Simone de Bovuar, Julia Kristeva, Mishel Fuko va Elen Siksu kabi nazariyotchilar tomonidan ishlab chiqilgan feministik g'oyalarga tayanib, badiiy matnlarda ayollarning azob-uzubati, kamsitilishi va qarshilik ko'rsatish jarayonlarining tasvirlanishini o'rganiladi.

Maqolada afg'on ayollari erkaklar hokimiyati va madaniy hukmronlik qurbonlari sifatida tasvirlanganiga e'tibor qaratiladi. Shuningdek, Afg'oniston diniy va patriarxal me'yorlar ta'sirida shakllangan erkak markazli jamiyat sifatida tahlil qilinadi. Ayollarning cheklangan erkinliklari va ijtimoiy faolligining yo'qligi yoritilishi orqali, tadqiqot patriarxal tuzilmalar doirasida gender tengligi va ijtimoiy adolat zarurligini ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: ayollar, patriarxat, erkaklar hukmronligi, erkinlik, oila, najot.

Аннотация. В данной научной статье рассматривается положение женщин в рамках патриархального социального устройства на примере романа Халеда Хоссейни «Тысяча сияющих солнц». Опираясь на феминистские идеи, разработанные такими теоретиками, как Симона де Бовуар, Юлия Кристева, Мишель Фуко и Элен Сиксу, исследование анализирует изображение женских страданий, маргинализации и сопротивления в литературных текстах. Особое внимание уделяется образу афганских женщин, представленных как жертвы мужской власти и культурного господства.

Кроме того, Афганистан рассматривается как общество, ориентированное на мужское доминирование и сформированное религиозными и патриархальными нормами.

Подчеркивая ограниченность женской свободы и отсутствие социальной субъектности, исследование акцентирует необходимость гендерного равенства и социальной справедливости в условиях патриархальных структур.

Ключевые слова: женщины, патриархат, мужское доминирование, свобода, семья, спасение.

Abstract. This research paper examines the position of women within a patriarchal social framework, with particular reference to Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Drawing on feminist thought developed by theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, and Hélène Cixous, the study explores the portrayal of female suffering, marginalization, and resistance in literary texts. The paper focuses on Afghan women who are depicted as victims of male authority and cultural domination. It further analyzes Afghanistan as a male-centered society shaped by religious and patriarchal norms. By highlighting women's restricted freedoms and lack of agency, the study underscores the necessity of gender equality and social justice within patriarchal structures.

Keywords: women, patriarchy, male dominance, freedom, family, salvation.

Introduction. The issue of women's status has remained a central topic of scholarly debate for decades. Across history, women have consistently been denied equal rights due to deeply rooted patriarchal systems that govern social organization.

Patriarchy, often perceived as universal and natural, has contributed significantly to the existential suffering of women by positioning them as subordinate and dependent. This dominance has resulted in the objectification of women and the monopolization of their identities by male authority.

Contemporary feminist thinkers have challenged these entrenched assumptions and attempted to dismantle the rigid structures that sustain gender inequality. In Afghan society, women are particularly constrained by patriarchal traditions that dictate their roles, behaviors, and life choices. These restrictions are vividly portrayed in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where marriage is presented as a woman's primary social function. Marriages are frequently arranged, and significant age differences between husbands and wives are normalized, reinforcing male control.

Methods. Simone de Beauvoir's foundational feminist text *The Second Sex* argues that womanhood is not biologically predetermined but socially constructed. According to Beauvoir, civilization shapes women into subordinate beings rather than nature itself. Her ideas strongly oppose patriarchal subjugation and advocate women's liberation from imposed roles. Similarly, Julia Kristeva questions the fixed definition of "woman," suggesting that female identity is fluid and cannot be confined within rigid social categories. Her work highlights the relationship between language, subjectivity, and male-centered discourse.

Michel Foucault's theories on power, discipline, and the body, although not explicitly focused on gender, have been influential in feminist discourse. His analysis of how power operates through institutions and social norms helps explain how women's bodies and sexuality are controlled within patriarchal societies. Likewise, Hélène Cixous has made a lasting contribution to feminist literary criticism by emphasizing women's voices and challenging male-dominated narratives.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American writer, draws on his early experiences in Afghanistan to portray the socio-political realities of the country. While comparisons are often made between *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and his earlier novel *The Kite Runner* (2003), critics generally agree that the former offers a more nuanced and emotionally powerful depiction of Afghan society, particularly women's lives. Through the characters of Mariam and Laila, Hosseini exposes the hardships faced by women amid war, political upheaval, and domestic oppression.

Women, Patriarchy, and Forced Choices

Results. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, women's lives are shaped by circumstances beyond their control. Mariam is forced into marriage with Rasheed, a much older man, after being rejected by her father and his wives. Her consent is merely symbolic, reflecting the lack of agency afforded to women. Laila, the second protagonist, is similarly compelled to marry Rasheed after losing her parents and discovering her pregnancy. In both cases, marriage becomes a survival strategy rather than a personal choice.

Hosseini's novels—*The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *the Mountains Echoed* (2013)—have achieved global recognition, selling millions of copies worldwide. Among them, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* most explicitly addresses women's deprivation of rights, including restrictions on education, freedom of movement, and personal expression. These limitations suppress women's potential and reinforce male supremacy within Afghan society.

Forced marriages, lack of identity, limited autonomy, and physical and psychological abuse are recurring themes throughout the novel. Hosseini situates these issues within Afghanistan's broader historical and political context, rather than attributing them solely to the Taliban regime.

He suggests that women's suffering predates and extends beyond specific political eras, emphasizing the need to recognize women as essential contributors to the nation's rebuilding.

Female Suffering, Hope, and Resistance

Mariam's life illustrates the profound injustice faced by Afghan women. Despite her innocence, she is blamed for circumstances beyond her control and punished simply for being female. Her mother's prophetic words—that Mariam would grow into a woman who endures silently—become tragically accurate. Mariam's suffering is not the result of personal failure but of systemic oppression reinforced by social norms and historical forces.

Afghanistan's turbulent history—marked by civil war, Soviet invasion, and Taliban rule—deeply affects women's lives. Mariam's tragedy would likely have unfolded regardless of individual choices, highlighting how socio-political instability exacerbates gender-based oppression. In contrast, Laila's upbringing is initially marked by love, education, and freedom.

However, her sudden descent into loss and deprivation underscores the fragility of women's security in a volatile society.

Hope emerges as a recurring motif in the novel. Mariam's desire to attend school and Laila's dreams of escape with Tariq symbolize women's aspirations for a better future. Yet these hopes are frequently crushed by harsh realities, reflecting the cyclical pattern of hope and despair experienced by Afghan women. This emotional rhythm mirrors the broader political disappointments faced by the nation.

Education, Female Bonds, and Empowerment

Discussion. Education plays a crucial role in shaping women's consciousness in the novel.

Mariam's education is limited to religious instruction, and her mother insists that endurance is the only lesson a woman needs. This belief reflects societal expectations that train women to accept suffering from an early age. In contrast, Laila's father strongly supports her education, treating her intellectual development as equal to that of a boy. Even during times of danger, he continues to educate her at home.

Later, both Mariam and Laila contribute to Aziza's education, demonstrating women's commitment to empowering the next generation. These acts of teaching symbolize resistance against a system that seeks to deny women knowledge. The strong emotional bonds formed among women—whether between friends, mothers and daughters, or surrogate families—serve as sources of strength and survival.

The novel highlights how female solidarity enables resistance. Mariam's courage to confront Rasheed is fueled by the love and confidence she gains from Laila. Despite efforts by men and political authorities to isolate women, they continue to support one another emotionally and intellectually.

The Double Oppression of Gender and Society

From the very beginning, the novel exposes the deeply ingrained patriarchy of Afghan society. Mariam, born an illegitimate child, faces stigma not only from society but also within her own family.

Her life is shaped by the decisions of men—her father, her husband Rasheed—and by societal expectations. Through Mariam’s experiences, Hosseini illustrates how women’s identities and futures are often dictated by tradition and male authority.

Laila, though initially enjoying more freedom due to her family’s progressive values, soon finds herself entrapped in similar societal shackles. The contrast between her upbringing and her later experiences under the Taliban regime underscores the ****pervasive nature of women’s oppression****, regardless of individual circumstances.

Solidarity and Female Friendship

Despite the adversities, one of the most powerful feminist messages in the novel is the “unbreakable bond between women”. The evolving relationship between Mariam and Laila serves as a testament to the strength women find in each other. Initially strangers, and even rivals, the two women build a deep sisterhood. Their solidarity helps them endure Rasheed’s abuses and the devastation of war. This bond is not only a form of resistance but also an act of defiance against the isolation imposed by patriarchy.

Patriarchy, Taliban Rule, and Gender Injustice

Under Taliban rule, women’s oppression becomes institutionalized. Laws enforced strict dress codes, restricted movement, and imposed severe punishments for perceived moral violations.

Rasheed’s threats to Laila exemplify how men exploit these systems to exert unchecked power. The Taliban merely extended into public life the violence already normalized within households.

Marriage arrangements in the novel reflect varying degrees of patriarchy. While Laila’s parents share a loving and relatively egalitarian relationship, Mariam’s mother suffers lifelong shame after being rejected. Jalil’s polygamous household mirrors Rasheed’s dominance, further illustrating how patriarchal practices perpetuate women’s suffering.

Ultimately, the novel connects women’s oppression to broader systems of male dominance reinforced by religious extremism and political instability. For Mariam and Laila, the arrival of the Taliban represents not the beginning but the culmination of lifelong repression.

Their journeys reflect a growing awareness of gender injustice and a quiet determination to reclaim dignity and agency.

Conclusion. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* offers a powerful portrayal of Afghan women’s lives within a deeply patriarchal society. Through Mariam and Laila, Khaled Hosseini exposes the structural inequalities that deny women freedom, education, and identity. The novel highlights women’s resilience, emotional strength, and capacity for solidarity despite overwhelming oppression. By situating female suffering within historical, cultural, and political contexts, Hosseini emphasizes the urgent need for gender justice and equality. Mariam’s transformation from an unwanted child into a woman of moral courage ultimately symbolizes the enduring spirit of Afghan women.

A Thousand Splendid Suns stands as a moving tribute to women’s resilience and solidarity in the face of adversity. Through nuanced characters and evocative storytelling, Khaled Hosseini illuminates the ****feminist themes**** of struggle, friendship, and agency. The novel invites readers not only to witness, but also to empathize with the lived realities of women under patriarchy—ultimately inspiring hope for equality and freedom.

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