



**ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL**

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 01. July-September 2025. Page#.1367-1377

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)



**Oppression and Defiance: A Feministic Analysis of Khalid Hosseini's Novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns***

**Muhammad Safyan**

Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, University of Narowal, Pakistan.

[muhammadsafyanwarraich@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadsafyanwarraich@gmail.com)

**Hifsa Faiz**

BS English Literature, Department of English, University of Narowal, Pakistan.

[hifsafaiz7@gmail.com](mailto:hifsafaiz7@gmail.com)

**Aysha Khalik**

Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, University of Narowal, Pakistan.

[aysha.khalik2014@gmail.com](mailto:aysha.khalik2014@gmail.com)

**Adeeba Manzoor**

Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, University of Narowal, Pakistan

[adiba4664@gmail.com](mailto:adiba4664@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines women's systemic oppression and empowerment under Taliban rule in Khalid Hosseini's novel A Thousand Splendid Suns. It analyzes the intersecting chords of power, patriarchy, oppression and liberation. The concept of suppression of French feminist Simon De Beauvoir is used as a framework for the analysis of the text. By keeping in view the feminist framework, the study explores the journey of two female protagonists and their forced marriage, domestic abuse, Taliban's oppression and their ultimate empowerment. Despite vitriol conditions, their lives are filled with moments of resistance, solidarity, rebellion against patriarchy and women's empowerment. They make education and mutual love their strength and found their identity. Deep reading of the text of the novel is used as a primary resource, while articles, interviews and different books are used as secondary resources of the text. This study is significant as it explores and highlights the effects of oppression, patriarchy and empowerment. Using the qualitative analysis, the study criticizes the systemic oppression of woman and the need for their liberation in the face of darkness.*

**Keywords:** *Oppression, Feminism, Khalid Hussein, Thousand Splendid Suns.*

**Introduction**

This study aims to explore women's suppression, marginalization and empowerment in a novel by Afghan writer. Many writers have written on this universal topic of feminism. In some parts of the world, even today, women are treated like lower creatures. They have to face torture, submissiveness, violence, harassment, men dominance and marginalization. Their life is just a series of trials they have to go through continuously. There is no end to their pains. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was written by Khalid Hosseini in 2007. It is a poignant tale of women's sacrifices and torments in East Asia. It is a tale of two women named Laila, an orphan and Mariam, an illegitimate child. Mariam was an illegitimate child who was shunned from society due to her

illegitimate birth and later, after the death of her mother, she got married to a man of predatory bearing. She faced verbal and physical abuse which was done to make her submissive. Although in love with Tariq, her childhood friend, Laila, a victim of war's cruelty is helpless due to circumstances to marry Rasheed, Mariam's husband. Their fate was intertwined through that marriage. The novel is set against the backdrop of war and political instability and shows how women are the victims of all of this. After the birth of her second child, Zalmai, Laila decides to escape from the home with Mariam and her children. She refuses to be a victim for her whole life. But the Taliban rule and the ruthless world made it impossible. They came back and Rasheed made their life a living hell. Tariq came back and Rasheed, in a fit of rage, tried to strangle Laila but Mariam killed him with a shovel. Mariam was sentenced to death. Laila and Tariq got married and Laila started teaching at an orphanage to keep the memory of Mariam alive. The novel shows the bravery and resilience of Afghan women in the face of adversity, how they encounter the hardships of life together and how they do not lose hope and try to build their lives with the ashes. This novel tries to dismantle the patriarchal system deep rooted in Afghan society, like a poison. The questions for the present study state "How patriarchal societies perpetuate gender based oppression?" and "Can women empower themselves despite patriarchal obstacles?"

### Literature Review

Broad, (2019) stated that Mary Astel was one of 17<sup>th</sup> century feminist writer who put the foundation of woman's right and autonomy. She was a philosophy student and used her philosophical approach to advocate woman rights and the right to education. Politics and history influenced her. Her major works include *A serious proposal to ladies*, 1694 and *Some reflection upon marriage*, 1700 in which she wrote about female colleges and marital rights. Husbands could take away a wife's property at will, because the law said it was their property. They could rape their wives. They could starve their wives – they were only expected to provide enough food just to keep them alive. They couldn't murder their wives, but they could take away every liberty, every independent means of supporting themselves. They could make their lives an absolute misery and not be accountable to the law." (Broad, 2019)

According to Sotto Santi, Mary Wollstonecraft (born April 27, 1759, London, England—died September 10, 1797, London) wrote about equality in education. Her famous work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), women were not weak but society trained them to be frivolous. An equal education for both sexes would improve society, where women would join all the professions. She was angered at how the education system for women made them think that the only purpose of their life was to serve their husbands, while men, on the other hand, were educated to achieve the profession of their choice (Sotto Santi, 1792). She also advocated for women to be allowed to train for and enter numerous professions, including medicine, nursing, and business. Men, and society at large, would benefit from the full inclusion of women in the public sphere, she maintained. (Sotto Santi, para.7)

According to Burkett, Brunell et al, Elizabeth Stanton, Susan B Anthony and Sojourner Truth were 19<sup>th</sup>-century famous feminist activists. They demanded equal rights for women in political and professional spheres. Susan B. Anthony formed the National Suffrage Association in 1869. They asked for the right to vote and in 1920, feminist activists celebrated their first victory in achieving suffrage. In the speech, Truth remarked, "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps

me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?" (Burket, Brunell, et al.)

Second wave of feminism focused on liberation of women and worked against discrimination, harassment and rape. [Emma Goldman](#) said that women could not be liberated without [dismantling](#) such institutions as the family, private [property](#), and state power. (Burket, Brunell, et al.)

Bell hooks claims that feminism is the combating force against sexism, gender inequality and suppression, not as a result of hatred against men. She believes that love, solidarity and self-love will help in this fight against marginalization of women. Bell hooks sees White supremacy and colonialism leading cause of women's suppression. Bell hooks rejected the exclusionary feminism and argues that feminism should strive for the rights and needs of all marginalized women.

For Hooks, feminism is not just about gender equality but about ending all forms of domination. She defined it as, "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." (Feminism is for everybody). She critiques the notion that feminism is against men; she thinks that patriarchy is harming men by making their masculinity toxic. Hook believed that love is an active transformative force that can bring justice and end domination.

Hooks' writings and her tying of personal experiences to feminine critique reshaped the feminism movement. By centering love and justice, she offered a milestone for equitable communities beyond patriarchal dominance. Afghan literature, particularly feminist literature, is a powerful tool to break through the chains of tradition oppression and marginalization within a complex societal structure. Writers are trying to redefine women's identities, securing equality rights for them and bringing a change in their patriarchal society. The position of women in Afghanistan has traditionally been inferior to that of men.

Key themes are displacement and lost, resilience, patriarchy, war and freedom. Key Afghan feminist writers include Malalai Joya, Khalid Hosseini, Mariam Mehboob and Spojami zaryab. Khalid Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist, was born in Kabul, Afghanistan 1965. Later, in 1980, his family asked for political asylum in the United States of America. By then, Afghanistan had already suffered a ruthless communist takeover and the incursion of the Soviet army, the American Invasion, followed by the dreadful reign of the Taliban ([Imran et al., 2020](#)).

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* explores the emotional and social issues of tribal and urban life in Afghanistan. The novel depicts how Afghans often oscillate between happiness and disappointment, hope and despair, as they contend with both foreign and internal conflicts. Hosseini's vivid portrayal of the two main female characters offers a powerful glimpse into Afghanistan's history during the late twentieth century. He also provides an detailed account of the Taliban's oppressive regime, highlighting how their religiously driven beliefs foster a society where women face oppression and lose their basic rights. (Imran M and Ismail SM, 2022).

Safyan et al., (2023) in the article *Women's Suppression or Empowerment? A Critical Study of Rubies for a Dog: A Fable* suggests that women are considered inferior creatures in a patriarchal society. They have to follow the orders given by their men. But they can empower themselves after rising voice in their own favor. They can enjoy their rights after raising their voices against patriarchal rules. (Safyan et al., 2023)

### **Research Methodology**

This study applies a qualitative research method to find out the oppression, marginalization of women, patriarchal hypocrisy and dominance, and women's empowerment in the novel *The*

Thousand Splendid Suns by Khalid Hosseini by applying feminism as a general framework. This research applies textual and thematic analysis to understand the underlying themes. Simon De Beauvoir's concept of the suppression of women is applied as a framework for the analysis of the text of the novel.

### Analysis

*The Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini is a heart-wrenching story that shows the healing exploration in the face of adversity and patriarchal dominance in Middle Eastern society. The story highlights the lives of two women, Laila and Mariam, who are bound together by the knots of suffering, fate and solidarity. It shows the tyrannical mindset of patriarchal society and also shows the possibility and need for liberation and empowerment of women. Applying Bell Hooks' ideas of feminist framework, the study is going to explore how toxic masculinity oppresses, crushes women's personalities, bottles up their lives and how the trans-formative power of love and solidarity brings up the possibility of resistance against male dominance and the empowerment of women.

Mariam, an illegitimate child, a harami is shunned off due to her lower class and gender. Her illegitimate birth wasn't her own fault yet she faces the retribution of it her whole life. She spent the 15 years of her life bottled up due to a sin which she didn't even commit.

"Mariam feels the full sting of it. She understood then what Nana meant, that a harami was an unwanted thing; that she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claims to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home and acceptance." (Hosseini, 2007, p.4)

Her life was restrained to few yards of her house. She dreams of going to Herat which was walking distance from her home. When Jalil talked about Herat, she would listen with enchantment. The blame of Nana's pregnancy was put on herself due to her lower status and patriarchal dominance. Jalil told his wives that Nana "forced" herself on him. She said:

"Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always." (Hosseini, 2007, p.6)

The blame of Jalil's infidelity and adultery was put on her. She suffered the pointed fingers of world alone. She suffered the mocking stares of the world, which caused her mental trauma and ultimately lead to her suicide. This is what women suffer due to their identity.

She said she wanted to live somewhere detached, removed, where neighbors wouldn't stare at her belly, point at her, snicker, or worse yet, assault her with insincere kindness.

During her delivery, there was no one beside her. She went through that most difficult time of her life alone lying on the floor of Kolba with a knife beside her in miserable pain. This is the true example of a cruel and inhumane world where women are treated like some lower being.

"I cut the cord between us myself that's why I had a knife." (Hosseini, 2007, p.8)

When Jalil came to know that he had a new daughter he didn't even look at Mariam for over a month. Due to her identity even her father didn't glance at her properly. Even she didn't have the right to get a proper education. Nana thought that there was nothing out there for Mariam but heartache and rejections.

"There's 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 that is this; Tahammul. Endure". (Hosseini, 2007, p.12)

"How women like us suffer, she'd said. How quietly we endure all that falls upon us." (Hosseini, 2007, p.52)

That is the condition of many women in Middle East, where women are deprived of their rights of life, education, marriage, career and happiness. The only thing left for them is to soak all the pains of life in themselves like nothing happened, like they are not humans but robots who smile, weep or live according to the whims of the superior men around them. Moreover, despite these miseries they suffer, the pains they endure, they have to behave subdued and mannerly to satisfy the ego of toxic masculinity around them. Their lives are confined to few yards or few houses around them, they wonder about the world beyond their houses and if there are women who live, laugh, get education, and make a career according to their own choices. They wonder if this is possible.

"He was Mariam's link, her proof that there existed a world at large, beyond Kolba, beyond Gul Daman and beyond Herat too ....." ([Hosseini, 2007](#))

With all the screams they hold in their throats, with all the pains they suffer alone, with all the sacrifices they make, there is not even a pinch of gratitude in the men around them. Their happiness or sorrow simply don't matter to them; what matters is the satisfaction of the desires.

"A man's heart is a wretched, wretched thing, Mariam. It isn't like a mother's womb. It won't bleed, it won't stretch to make a room for you." ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.17)

Another harsh and painful reality these women have to suffer is early age marriage with men who are decades older than them. Men who have rugged beard, harsh voices and rough demeanor. men who disregards women's autonomy and agency. These women are denied the right to marry the person that suits them. Their preferences or desires are completely disregarded which leave them vulnerable to the whims of cruel society. Their lives are controlled by patriarchal norms which leave them no hold over their own destinies. This highlights the need for liberation and empowerment, which would allow them to make their own choices.

The prospect of marriage fills these women with fears and dreads, the thought of being trapped in a stranger's house where they have to surrender to his whims and desires. The thoughts of being intimate to a stranger they have never loved or chosen is horrifying which leave them drenched in anxiety and pain. Their dignities are no longer their own but mere possession of their husband's behest. They have to yield to stranger's desires which leave them stripped off of their dignity and self-worth.

"She imagined herself there, at the other end of Kabul, at an unimaginable distance, living in a stranger's house where she would have to concede to his moods and his issued demands." ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.30)

They are not befitting for each other in any manner but Mariam's family stripped off her right to exist unbound. Her wings were cut off before taking first flight. At the age of 16 she had to give her life, beauty and prime to a person who was contemporaneous to her father. The hideousness and ugliness of his appearance was transparent like a glass untouched by breath but her family brushed it aside like it was nothing to give their daughter to a person who had untamed demeanor and predatory bearing. He was like a nightmare in flesh.

"The big, square, ruddy face; the hooked nose; the flushed cheeks that gave the impression of sly cheerfulness; the watery, bloodshot eyes; the crowded teeth, the front two pushed together like a gabled roof; the impossibly low hairline, barely two finger widths above the bushy eyebrows; the wall of thick, coarse, salt-and-pepper hair." (Hosseini, 2007, p.32)

Khalid Hosseini depicts how patriarchal society want to silence the women. their emotional distress and tears are asked to be silent due to inconvenience to men. They have to silent their screams because it would cause discomfort to men. They are treated inhumanly due to their

gender. Men want to silence their screams to free themselves from responsibility and accountability.

"That's one thing I can't stand," he said, scowling, "the sound of a woman crying. I'm sorry. I have no patience for it." (Hosseini, 2007, p.35)

Patriarchal society has no regard for women's emotions, their feelings and distress are devalued. Men lack compassion and empathy, as Hosseini writes, "Every woman needed a husband. Even if he did silence the song in her" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 187)

He intimates her and controls her to the point of submissiveness. His behavior is authoritarian towards her and he treats her like a slave with no autonomy or freedom to speak.

Well, as of tomorrow morning I expect you to start behaving like a wife. Fahmidi? Is that understood?" Mariam's teeth began to chatter. (Hosseini, 2007, p.38)

These lines are not an expression of love, these words are a command to start molding herself to his expectations. These are the first red flags which made her foresee her coming life.

In those societies, there is systemic inequality and brutality for women where they are exploited. They lack any financial independence while being bound to controlling husbands who do not value them and treat them like mere slaves to follow their commands and to cater to their whims. They are married off like an anchor chained to ankle in deep waters, like an encumbrance. They are shunned from society, and their only role is to serve and appease societal standards.

Husbands who gambled. Husbands who doted on their mothers and would not spend a rupiah on them, the wives. Mariam wondered how so many women could suffer the same miserable luck, to have married, all of them, such dreadful men. (Hosseini, 2007, p.39)

He forces Mariam to wear Abaya without her consent. He enforces traditional norms on her. In the rotten cultures, violence is seen as a strength and a proud thing; he is hiding his true nature in the guise of tradition and culture and is freeing himself of the responsibility of his actions. He asserts forceful domination over her under the cover of everyday speech. He treats Mariam as a mere object, a mere property for possession, not a human.

But I'm a different breed of man, Mariam. Where I come from, one wrong look, one improper word, and blood is spilled. Where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only. I want you to remember that. Do you understand?" (Hosseini, 2007, p.42)

But he shows hypocrisy in his behaviors when he explores nudity on magazines. Isn't this against nang o namoos?

On every page were women, beautiful women who wore no shirts, no trousers, no socks or underpants (Hosseini, 2007, p.47).

But Mariam tries to justify this act with the rotten patriarchal thoughts deep-rooted within her. Slowly an explanation presented itself. He was a man after all living alone all these years before she moved in. (Hosseini, 2007, p.48)

This shows the miserable state of those societies where every sin of man is forgiven whether it's Jalil's infidelity or Rasheed's magazine. They are forgiven and their sins are covered up.

She only had to think of the other man in her life. Jalil, a husband of three and father of nine at the time, having relations with Nana out of wedlock. Which was worse, Rasheed's magazine or what Jalil had done? (Hosseini, 2007, p.48)

But during this oppression, signs of resistance are forming. These women are not fragile, after enduring so many things, they are still trying to pave their way in every sphere of society. Here is a paradoxical effect that some women are oppressed like slaves, while other women have



professional degrees, who have autonomy and independence. These independent women mystified Mariam, she thought that there was such a type of woman. These women aroused consciousness in the mind of her ignorance, confinement and systematic deprivation.

She imagined that they all had university degrees and worked in office buildings, behind desks of their own, where they typed and smoked and made important telephone calls to important people. These women mystified Mariam. They made her aware of her lowness, plain looks, lack of aspirations, and ignorance of so many things. ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.44)

He gets his marital rights from her without asking her permission, and even forces it on her. His hesitation for a moment was not remorse, he was thinking about his next action. The chilling moments of giving yourself to a person who you are yet a stranger is terrifying and breath taking. This happened inside a place which was supposed to be her own home, her safe place, due to her husband, who was supposed to be the protector of her honor. On the surface, he is just getting his right, but deep down, he is asserting his dominance, wants her to submit to him regardless.

There was a moment of hesitation, and then his hand was on her neck, his thick fingers slowly pressing the knobs in the back of it....."I can't," she croaked ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.44)

Hosseini also explored how society preferred sons over girls because they would carry family lineage and they are symbolic with strength and control while girls on the other hand are symbolized with weakness and burden of responsibility. When Mariam knew about her pregnancy she asked Rasheed what if it's a girl? This is not just a question, it demonstrates her fears after knowing too much about society's preferences where giving birth to a daughter means facing future hardships, and displeasing their husbands.

"What if it's a girl?" Mariam said. "I think it's a boy. Yes. A boy" ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.49)

You can't be too careful. Boys are reckless creatures. ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.50)

Mariam lived in constant fear. she lost her self-worth, her defying voice and every sign of happiness. Rashed just used her as a vessel for producing heir but when she failed, he started abusing her relentlessly. His unpredictable mood swings and violence made her unsafe in her own house. Domestic abuse was normalized like it was nothing. Her psychological state of mind was destructed due to the loss of self-worth and autonomy. She was reduced to a mere object for Rasheed to resolve his anger.

"And Mariam was afraid She lived in fear of his shifting moods, his volatile temperament, his insistence on steering even mundane exchanges down a confrontational path that, on occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks...." ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.56)

Rasheed made the life of Mariam like caged bird continuously being tormented. His psychological and physical abuse was designed to make her submissive. When Mariam burnt rice accidentally he forced her to chew pebbles as punishment to show his dominance.

"Now you know what you rice taste like. Now you know what you have given me in this marriage. Bad food and nothing else." ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.59)

This novel also explores the oppression of women under Taliban rule. This regime imposes a rigid extremist imposition of Islamic laws, stripping away some basic human rights. Some of the things are so extreme that there is no place for them in Islam. Taliban enforced male dominance in the cover of Islamic rules. They forbidden working for women and education which is not written anywhere in Islam. Female doctors were banned, due in pregnant women suffering. Hospital supplies were scarce and when Laila gave birth to Aziza she did it without painkillers or sleeping

medication. Women were forbidden to go outside without male mehram and publicly show their faces. Music books,, art,s, and any criticism were banned, leading to punishment and even death. "It is not proper for women to wander about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a mehram, a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home..... Girls are forbidden from attending school All schools for girls will be closed immediately. Women are forbidden from working." ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.144)

"Where is your mehram? ... Do you want me to drag you to the local police station and teach you a lesson you won't forget?"

This novel portrays women's suppression and patriarchal dominance but it also shows the quiet rebellion, solidarity and ultimate empowerment of women. At the end of the novel, Laila succeeds in gaining her self-worth. Laila's father Babi was an important character who shaped the strengths of Laila through education. He continues to teach her even after the school gets banned. Because Afghan society needs change in its patriarchal structure and only educated mothers and women can bring this change.

"And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, maybe even more. Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila No chance." ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.64)

Babi is a ray of hope in that society, representing positive masculinity. He supported his wife emotionally during her depression and he educated their daughter alone. When Fariba was not ready to leave Afghanistan, he supported her in his decision with love and respect. For her, he refused to accept the only chance to live. Her decision and peace of mind were more important to him than his life.

"For Mammy, he would brush aside this daydream of his way, he flicked specks of flour from his coat when he got home from work. And so they would stay". ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.84)

The war times especially normalized the abuse of women, women were beaten, raped and killed. They were the biggest victim of those dark times. Women were not safe in their houses or in streets. Anybody who had power became inhumane and started preying on women.

"Did you hear? Sisters. All three raped. Their throats slashed. Someone had bitten the rings off their fingers. You could tell, they had teeth marks-" ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.98)

"Mariam heard of women who were killing themselves out of fear of being raped, and of men who, in the name of honor, would kill their wives or daughters if they'd been raped by the militia"([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.132).

Women who didn't have any mahram were treated like prostitutes; their only purpose was to satisfy men's bestial needs.

"She could keep warm in one of those Peshawar brothels. Business is booming there, I hear. A beauty like her ought to bring in a small fortune, don't you think?" ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.115)

When Mariam protested against his second marriage, he silenced her without any remorse. For him it was a normal thing to marry as many wives as he wanted. It demonstrated the rotten state of his mind as well as the exploitation of society.

"Don't be so dramatic. It's a common thing and you know it. I have friends who have two, three, four wives. Your own father had three. Besides, what I'm doing now most men I know would have done long ago." ([Hosseini, 2007](#), p.115)

Rasheed's hostile behavior towards Aziza was particularly evident. She was always taken aback due to Rasheed's misbehavior. She was malnourished as compared to Zalmai. These all things how



girls are oppressed and mistreated in their own homes in patriarchy. Rasheed denied her humanity and treated her like an object which was a burden on him.

"Sometimes, I swear, sometimes I want to put that thing in a box and let her float down Kabul River. Like baby Moses." (Hosseini, 2007, p.125)

Laila risks the punishment from Taliban and tries to teach her daughter Aziza. Initially Laila and Mariam were hostile towards each other but when Rasheed's abuse extended its limits. They tried to escape.

"We're leaving this spring, Aziza and I. Come with us, Mariam". (Hosseini, 2007, p.)

Although their attempt failed, it was their first attempt at defiance. They refused to imprison themselves for the whole life; they remained brave and tried to find light in the darkness of their life.

"Then she was being dragged by the hair. She saw Aziza lift, her sandals slip off, and her tiny feet kicking. Hair was ripped from Laila's scalp, and her eyes watered with pain." (Hosseini, 2007, p.141.)

On the other hand, Rasheed treated his son like a treasure, his love for Zalmai was boundless due to his gender. Because he would carry his lineage, he was allowed to be spoiled to revolt and act according to his wishes, Rasheed would play with Zalmai and fulfil his every wish, just because he was a son, not a daughter.

"Rasheed took him to the shop, let him crawl around under his crowded workbench, play with old rubber soles and spare scraps of leather..... His patience with Zalmai was a well that ran deep and never dried." (Hosseini, 2007, p.152)

Rasheed made Laila send Aziza to an orphanage, ultimately. Laila's love for Aziza runs deep than blood. She would get beaten by Taliban and would still go to see her. There were bruises all over her body, but the joy of seeing her daughter once again made her forget them all.

"I'll come and see you. I'm your mother. If it kills me, I'll come and see you." (Hosseini, 2007, p.163.)

They denied to being a victim for the whole life, love for Aziza and love for Tariq reshaped their lives. When Rasheed tries to strangle Laila Mariam kills him with a shovel and this moment transformed their lives.

"Mariam steadied her feet and tightened her grip around the shovel's handle. She raised it. She said his name. She wanted him to see. "Rasheed." He looked up. Mariam swung. She hit him across the temple. The blow knocked him off Laila." (Hosseini, 2007, p.182)

But Mariam refused to implicate Laila, she embraces death to save Laila and his children. She sacrificed herself for the sake of her love for Aziza and Laila. A bond which was stronger than blood relations tied them together. She protected the ones she loved. This demonstrates the emerging defiance in Afghan society where women struggle to regain their freedom bravely.

"She thought of her entry into this world, the harami child.... She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at last. No. It was not so bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way. Not so bad." (Hosseini, 2007, p.195.)

After the downfall of Taliban, Laila starts teaching at an orphanage, keeping Mariam's memory alive. Her heart, filled with compassion and determination, struggled to make a change through education and spreading love.

"When the children spot Laila, they come running. They come running at full tilt. Laila is swarmed. There is a flurry of high-pitched greetings.... Some of them call her Mother. Laila does not correct them". (Hosseini, 2007, p.219.)

This novel shows that empowerment is not always due to a dramatic turns but can be found in endurance, patience, education and solidarity. Laila and Mariam's story shows that light can be found in the darkest dungeons and bravery can lead to Mariam's embracing death and Laila's struggles to provide education to orphans show how women stand up for their rights in the face of the system, which is designed to silence them. Aligning analysis with the feminism movement, which was against all forms of oppression, the story rejects the fatal masculinity. Instead, it highlights the strength of love and the enduring strength of the oppressed.

### Conclusion

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini depicts the brutal tyranny faced by Afghan women, including marital rape, domestic abuse, power dominance, early marriages and their silent acts of defiance and resilience. By showing Mariam and Laila's struggles marked by pain, sacrifices, and violence, the novel exposes the system of oppression in patriarchy. The novel also highlighted the sufferings of women under the Taliban's rule. Ntozake Shange asserts that "every three minutes a woman is beaten, every five minutes a woman is raped, every ten minutes a little girl is molested" (qt.. in Idris, p. 22). Novel highlights the trans formative force of love, which makes women like Mariam strong, education which enables Laila to defy injustice and compassion which enables Mariam and Laila to be willing to sacrifice for each other. Khalid Hosseini tried to empower the Afghan woman and combated gender polarization. The novel's conclusion shows that empowerment doesn't need dramatic rebellion but also through patience and unwavering pursuit of liberation. In doing so, Hosseini is criticizing women's marginalization and paying tribute to brave women around us.

### References

- Akhtar, S., Rauf, M., Ikram, S., and Raees, G. (2017). *A legitimate end to illegitimate beginning: a critical analysis of Mariam's character in A Thousand Splendid Suns*. English Lang. Lit. Stud. 7, 113–119. doi: 10.5539/ells.v7n1p113
- Broad, J. (2019, March 7). *Mary Astell: Feminism and philosophy in 17th-century Britain*. Lens Monash. Retrieved June 29, 2025, from <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2019/03/07/1373529/feminism-and-philosophy-in-the-17th-century>
- Brunell, L., Burkett, E. (2025, June 18). *feminism*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>
- Hooks, B. (2000). *All about love: New visions*. Harper Collins.
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Pluto Press. <https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745317335/feminism-is-for-everybody>
- Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*. New York, NY
- Hosseini, K. (2007). *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. New York, NY
- Imran, M., & Ismail, S. M. (2022). Khaled Hosseini's women as modern archetypes: A study of obedient, resistant and empowered Afghan women. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7, Article 1041435. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.1041435>
- Imran, M., Chen, Y., Wei, X. M., and Akhtar, S. (2020). *Veiled courage: Inside the women's resistance against violence through their writings*. Asian J. Women's Stud. 26, 74–93. doi: 10.1080/12259276.2020.1718392
- Rahimi, W. M. (1991). *Status of Women: Afghanistan*. Jakarta: UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Safyan, M., Iqbal, N., Nafees, M., & Ramzam, L. (2023). Women's Suppression or Empowerment? A Critical Study of Rubies for a Dog: A Fable. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(4), 4275-4280.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025, April 23). *Mary Wollstonecraft*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Wollstonecraft>