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Liberal Feminism: An analysis through the lens of Khaleed Hosseini's "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*"

Agisha A.G ^{a*} and Ms. V Thulasi Bala^b,

^{a*}Student, II MA English, Department of English,

Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, (Private University), Chennai.

^b Assistant professor, Department of English,

Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, (Private University), Chennai.

Correspondence: agishaag2020@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Feminism strives for gender equality, especially women's liberty, as women have been suppressed by the commandments of the patriarchal society. Khaleed Hosseini, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, quotes, "Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman" (Hosseini, 7). This clearly depicts the state of women in a society controlled by men. This research paper aims to analyse Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through the lens of liberal feminism, where male chauvinists, under the guise of religion, politics, family values, and customs, suppress women. Women are objectified and used for male's pleasure. On his visit to Afghanistan in 2003, Hosseini felt pity for the state of women, especially Muslim women, who traditionally cover themselves with a 'Burkas' which symbolizes how women's emotions and freedom are restricted and hidden within themselves. Women's identity has been determined by their male counterparts, fostering phallogocentric society that marginalizes women. However, their resilient nature has enabled them to withstand suppression and achieve liberation, gaining a sense of self. This paper focuses on liberal feminism, showcasing how women are oppressed by the phallogocentric society rise up and voice their demand for freedom. It highlights how women support each other even during their hardest times, demonstrating a positive relationship in a negative environment. The paper unveils the hardships women face on their path to liberation and how they build themselves as individuals in a patriarchal society, focusing on the characters Mariam and Laila, as well as other significant female characters from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Key words: Liberal feminism, male chauvinism, suppression, relationship, liberation, education.

Liberal feminism is a feminist ideology that prioritizes gender equality and highlights the necessity of legislative and political changes to attain gender parity. It promotes equal chances in work, education, and political engagement while fighting for the protection of women's rights within the confines of the current political and social systems. Rather than radically altering society, liberal feminists aim to eradicate gender inequality by legal modifications and social transformation. They seek to remove obstacles that keep women from realizing their full potential and hold the view that women should have the same opportunities, rights, and responsibilities as men. The distinguished modern novelist Khaled Hosseini is well-known for his perceptive depictions of Afghan life and its socio-political struggles. His two books, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *The Kite Runner* (2003), have received a great deal of praise for their compelling stories and examination of issues like gender, identity, and resiliency. Hosseini's work is praised for its intricate character development and capacity to convey the complexity of Afghan society in the midst of turbulent historical circumstances. Hosseini has significantly influenced global conversations on human rights and cross-cultural understanding through his literary works as well as his humanitarian endeavours.

A Thousand Splendid Suns, written by Khaled Hosseini in 2007, is a comprehensive examination of Afghan women's life in the middle of decades of socio-political unrest. The story of *Mariam* and *Laila*, two women from different generations whose lives intersect under their society's harsh dictatorship, is chronicled in the novel. Hosseini provides a moving reflection on the difficult conditions experienced by Afghani women through their individual hardships and resiliency, touching on issues of love, self-empowerment, and sacrifice. By showing the protagonist's struggles for strength and autonomy in the face of systemic gender discrimination, Hosseini adheres to liberal feminist ideals in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The book demonstrates how *Mariam* and *Laila*'s battles for equality and personal freedom within a constrictive sociocultural setting and their camaraderie represent liberal feministic values.

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini is a wonderful example of Liberal feminism. It shows how strong and empowered the female characters are in the face of patriarchal oppression in a civilization ravaged by war. Through the prism of gender, feminist literary criticism analyses literature, concentrating on how works represent, uphold, or subvert social norms surrounding women's identities and roles. One important subset of feministic thought, liberal feminism, emphasizes the value of equal opportunity, individual

autonomy, and legal rights while promoting gender equality within the confines of current social systems. Numerous studies have been conducted on Khaled Hosseini's books, which include *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, because of their depictions of Afghan culture, the effects of war, and the challenges faced by women in patriarchal countries. The novel's themes of pain, resiliency, and the convergence of political turmoil and personal upheaval have all been studied by academics. But a lot of the study that has already been done has concentrated on the historical and cultural background of Afghanistan, paying little attention to the particular feminist foundations of the story. There's a noticeable lack of liberal feminist interpretation of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* despite the wealth of scholarship on the book's cultural and historical elements. The challenges faced by female characters in the repressive patriarchy have been discussed in earlier research, but how these battles relate to the principles of liberal feminism has not been thoroughly examined. By providing a focused analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through the lens of liberal feminism and analysing how the book's female characters navigate and fight patriarchal structures on their path to empowerment, this research seeks to close this gap. Through the lens of liberal feminism, Khaled Hosseini examines the nuances of patriarchal tyranny and gender inequality in Afghan society in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, highlighting the strength and empowerment of women.

The protagonist of the novel Mariam has faced social restrictions imposed on her by patriarchal domination. Mariam's life is shaped by the constraints and expectations placed on her as a woman, starting with her arranged marriage to Rasheed and continuing through her illegitimacy. Nana tells Mariam, "It's our lot in life, Mariam. Women like us. We endure. It's all we have" (Hosseini, 18), which exhibits the gender inequality and suppression of female community in a male chauvinistic society. Mariam's father's actions have earned her the nickname "Harami," or bastard child. Mariam's father, Jalil, had an extramarital affair with Nana, during which she gave birth to Mariam. However, the woman was named as Harami and was socially marginalized and suffered for her illegitimacy, but the males were unaffected. This illustrates the brutal facts of patriarchy.

Mariam's life is dictated by deeply rooted patriarchal norms that reject her autonomy, which is highlighted as "Mariam wondered how so many women could suffer the same miserable luck, to have married, all of them, such dreadful men" (Hosseini, 65). Mariam was oppressed by her husband, Rasheed who is considered to be the prime example of male chauvinist in the novel. The shift of Mariam's life after the arrival of Laila represents her battle against the oppressive structures in her life. "This was a legitimate end to a life of

illegitimate beginnings " (361), exemplifies Mariam's path towards empowerment and self-acceptance, which is crucial within the framework of liberal feminism. In sacrificing Rasheed for Laila's safety, Mariam rises beyond the harsh conditions that shaped her life. Individual rights and self-determination are important to liberal feminism, and Mariam's act of killing Rasheed was a reclaiming of control over her own life and the lives of others she loved. Her calm contemplation just before she passes away emphasizes her acceptance of her acts as justified, demonstrating a dramatic shift from a weak, marginalized woman to one who asserts her autonomy and, in her last moments, finds validity and purpose. Mariam's path of resistance and autonomy is quite similar to that of liberal feminism, which places a strong emphasis on the pursuit of personal autonomy as well as individual rights and legal equality.

Mary Wollstonecraft makes the case in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that "Women must be allowed to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and they cannot do so if they are not educated to understand their own value" (Wollstonecraft, 45). Mariam's brave choice to confront Rasheed and her eventual recognition of her worth are examples of Wollstonecraft's advocacy for women's liberation by strength and self-awareness. The systematic oppression of women is also addressed in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, where she claims that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 330), implying that gender norms are socially rather than naturally established. The journey Mariam takes to transcend the constraints society places on her and redefine herself according to her own terms serves as an example of this idea.

Another significant character, Laila whose life revolves around education, which helped her to foresee a future free from the constraints of a patriarchal culture and as a tool for empowerment. Laila's father Babi who values education, insists, "Marriage can wait, education cannot" (Hosseini, 114). This conviction that education has the ability to change the world is consistent with liberal feminism's support of equal access to education as a necessary condition for achieving gender equality. Laila's education gives her the skills and self-assurance to deal with the difficulties she encounters, empowering her to make wise decisions. Despite being coerced into marrying Rasheed at first, Laila never stops trying to stand up for herself in this hostile setting. Laila emphasizes that women should be allowed to choose their positions within the family and society according to their own criteria, which is in line with liberal feminist ideals. Laila's commitment to social problems and her wish to make a positive impact on society are additional examples of the liberal feminist movement's emphasis on pursuing equal rights and civic engagement. Her choice to risk everything to

return to Kabul and aid in the reconstruction of the city demonstrates her dedication to social change and female empowerment. Her advocacy reflects her confidence in the ability of civic engagement to advance social justice and gender equality as well as her love for her country. Mariam and Laila's connection becomes a potent symbol of female camaraderie and unity. Their relationship is initially built through mutual tragedy, but it eventually develops into a powerful source of strength and support.

Mariam's evolving relationship with Laila and her kids, which represents her optimism for a better future, is reflected in this phrase. "*Two new flowers*" are Laila and her daughter Aziza, who unexpectedly give Mariam purpose and happiness, which is depicted as "A new life, a life in which she would find the blessings that Nana had said a Harami like her would never see. Two new flowers had unexpectedly sprouted in her life, and, as Mariam watched the snow coming down" (250). The transformational potential of female solidarity, a fundamental component of liberal feminism is highlighted by this change from hopelessness to optimism. Mariam's relationship with Laila gives her a sense of belonging and empowerment when she was formerly oppressed and alone. The protective role Mariam takes on is consistent with liberal feminism's focus on women's agency, support from one another, and reclaiming one's own worth in the face of patriarchal restraints. Their concerted efforts to oppose Rasheed and encourage one another's personal development demonstrate the power of female unity.

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini explores gender injustice and women's empowerment in a way that vividly reflects liberal feministic beliefs. The challenges faced by the book's female heroines, Mariam and Laila, are shown vividly against the backdrop of patriarchal tyranny. The two women's journeys Mariam's from oppression to self-realization, Laila's empowerment through activity and education, and their solidarity all speak to important liberal feminist principles like equality, individual liberty, and group support. The novel addresses the intersections of gender, culture, and personal agency, making an important contribution to feminist fiction through its detailed representation of the lives of Afghan women. In addition to enhancing the conversation on gender equality, the novel emphasizes the universal applicability of feminism. It delivers a significant commentary on the ongoing struggles for women's rights and empowerment in diverse cultural contexts by showcasing the agency and perseverance of its female protagonists.

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