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THE PLIGHT OF MARGINALIZED WOMEN IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS IN 'THE THIRD WORLD FEMINISM'

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Abstract

'Third World Feminism' investigates into the resistance and portrayal of women in literature in the oppressive and marginalizing territories. Postcolonial feminism highlights a tendency towards universalizing women by focusing on the involvement of women in the Western lifestyle in the war-stricken lands where they have been, on the one hand, segregated as inferior; yet, on the other hand, upheld as the instigators of resistance towards the betterment of societies in which the full impact of a misguided patriarchal rule breaks the women down emotionally, who are abused, deceived and controlled. Thus, this paper aims at displaying the observations considering local culture, gender discrimination and female passive resistance as far as collected from Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. The novel depicts the conflicts of identification of the women which pave the way for the degradation applied on the characters. Subsequently, from a postcolonial feministic perspective, the paper attempts to investigate the plights of women, which are enforced on them through the patriarchal components and standards of culture.

Keywords: Female Plight, Post-Colonial Feminism, Resistance, Identity, Freedom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Khaled Hosseini whose literary works have been designated as the cornerstones and "spokesperson" for the Afghan nation, is considered "revolutionary" in many ways. His stories are beset with emphasis and emotion that penetrate into human heart. He aims at separating right and wrong, love and betrayal that are infested in Afghan society. It's by his stories that readers come to recognize the plight of Afghans in a conflict-stricken society.

In his novels, Hosseini depicts characters that are exposed to unfairness and mistreatment. That's why abusive and bullying patriarchy and leaders run through the characterization which is a part of historical and political background. The characters in the novel are depicted to be suffering from a lowered self-esteem, pain, rejection and confusion. In the face of such turmoil, characters have to designate and formulate an outlet and glimpses of hope so that they might have a reason to live in this environment. They formulate a distinctive fight mechanism which fosters people into action in order to deal with prejudices and misfortunes.

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Hosseini grew up in the 1970s when women were free to attend schools; thus, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (from now on the title will be abridged as ATSS in references) (2007) is intended to bring depth and emotional subtext to the image of *burqa*-clad women. Important points are aimed to be covered in this novel; “that not all Afghan women of the past, present and future are bound to remain oppressed, and that the women behind the veils have inner lives and aspirations” (Andrews, 2016, 7).

In order to understand the women in the novel, it is required to shed light on the impact of storytelling traditions in Afghan society. Schooling is very low in Afghanistan. Folktales become effective in establishing relations and in the transfer of culture, thereby forming an average mentality and world outlook. Female characters are often portrayed as tricksters, who exploit various forms of trickery to protect themselves. Further, “gender centering” (Andrews, 2016, 8) leads to the portrayal of male characters as leaders who work outside the home, while women are majorly engaged in domestic chores.

This study presupposes an oppressive and traditional Afghan society where women characters in the novel try hard to gain freedom in their capacities as much as conditions allow them to. Hence, understanding the historical background is expected to help make clear their efforts, inspiration and the change that the women claim. The shared history includes the unfortunate effects of the tribal and patriarchal rule on the women for the last century. Looking into a historical background, it is evident that Afghanistan has faced decades of social violence leading to the destruction of structural framework and chaos among its people. The country is located along the crucial trade routes between Asia and the Middle East. It has been the battleground for wars triggered by Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States. Much of the agricultural plains have been destroyed by thousands of landmines and acres of opium fields that have rendered mobility limited especially for women, whose primary chores are restricted in households. Isolated from society due to security reasons, women have fewer jobs to perform outside of the home, which means fewer opportunities and resultantly poor economy. In other words, because of the drastic shift where educated women were removed from public jobs for a generation, the economy and family structures collapsed. On the exclusion of woman labor, Andrews (2016) states;

The removal of skilled and educated urban women meant the closure of most schools because over 50 percent of teachers were women. It meant further deterioration of public health as women workers were sent home. It meant the near collapse of badly maintained civil service as they were banned from public places and forced to stay at home. Overall, it intensified the social malaise gripping Afghanistan as a result of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and disease. (17)

In addition to disadvantageous geography, traditional and tribal domination did not let the country be merged with the developing ones. Appointments based on family ties and bloodlines increased the influence of men in the family and reinforced patriarchy. When the head of family, husband, father, passed away, the oldest son would be expected to resume. The concept of “endogamy”, marrying within one’s own lineage was encouraged to retain inheritance for men. Cultural preferences for male children over the female ones were linked with men’s ability to support the family. Furthermore, the influence of tradition is effective in religion. That’s to say, majority of Afghans see going against the faith as intolerable and disrespectful. Although many of Afghan rulers have attempted to create social reforms that might help women create their lives for themselves, the Mujahedeen and Taliban did not agree with new reforms, so women remained their targets making progress slow.

The novel opens with Mariam, living with her mother, Nana, in a village on the outskirts of Herat. On her fifteenth birthday, Mariam decides to travel to Herat to see her father, Jalil, for the first time; yet, she is not admitted to the house as she is an illegitimate child. When she returns home, she finds that Nana commits suicide for fear that Mariam deserted her for good. Jalil and his wives do not accept Mariam; thus, they arrange a quick marriage of her to an old widower, Rasheed, from Kabul. She is forced to a marriage and a new life of hardships. Yet, when Mariam suffers from miscarriages, Rasheed, who has expected a baby-boy for years, starts abusing her; in return, he decides to get the second wife, Laila, young and more beautiful, to the house since he is insistent on having a son. When Laila, a young daughter of ethnic Tajik parents, is forced to accept to be the second wife to Rasheed, Mariam’s plight increases as she is forced to serve Laila. Laila has lost her family in a bomb attack and is now pregnant from her lover, Tariq. When Laila is treated like a queen in the house, Mariam’s hopes for a better future are destroyed. Laila gives birth to Aziza, a baby girl, making Rasheed unhappy and suspicious; so, he becomes abusive on both women. Out of a common lot of the brutality they receive from Rasheed, the two women develop a bond of friendship as confidantes. As a result of the mistreatment in the house, they plan to run away for Pakistan but are both betrayed, arrested and returned to Rasheed, who severely beats them both, and deprives them of water for several days to the point of killing Aziza. After the birth of Zalmai, Rasheed’s son, the Taliban rises in



power, applies restrictions and bans women from social and professional life. When Tariq comes to the scene after years and Zalmai tells his secret visit to the house, Rasheed gets mad and attacks Laila almost killing her. Mariam, seeing Laila about to die, happens to kill Rasheed with a shovel, gets imprisoned and subsequently executed. Laila, Tariq and children move to Pakistan for some years before Laila urges them to return to Afghanistan and begins as a teacher realizing one of her dreams.

2. 'THIRD WORLD FEMINISM' AND GENDER EQUITY

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini does not hesitate putting forward the misfortunes against women. He gives a voice to these women who have been silenced for decades. He injects consciousness and determination as well as prestige to those who struggle against injustice. His novels honor them as mothers, sisters, daughters, wives and human beings, in a way that they rightly deserve. Patriarchal marriage laws, abusive husbands and corrupt policemen and politicians are brought into the light. Hosseini handles the patriarchy mechanism in built deep into the society and raises his voice on the side of women who reject the mentality that accepts women as possessions. Through the women characters his mission is to highlight the female voice not to be heard as the inferior sex.

Feminism is a broad topic including wide collective theories, political and moral philosophies basically focused on the inequality between man and woman. The quest for equality, which is connected to feminism in many respects, has long been on the agenda of man and woman relationships. Feminists assert that "woman and man have equal rights" (Singh, 2013: 88) and Afghan woman, an example for such struggles, is no exception to the principle under the nation's drastic conditions in the Third World and in a country where socio-cultural extremism and religious complaints and impediments have devastating impact on their lives and impaired the quality of life, even reducing female life expectancy. Thus, as an Afghan writer, while residing in the West, Khaled Hosseini analyzes the situation of woman in a larger historical context of Afghanistan by implicating a critical perspective to see women as integral to the rebuilding of the Afghan nation. Hosseini "draws the human face of the country that has been rarely portrayed before" (Souissi, 2015: 492). His characters with unique and stark features illustrate the ordinary, but real Afghans. Hosseini chronicles convergent journeys of his characters whose fates are interwoven with the fate of the nation and transmits socio-political turmoil to readers. Like in other novels, his characters are caught in vicious circles, struggling in the face of hardships and calamities. The novel's narrative lines are molded against the background of periods of stability and violent turbulence.

In an interview with Hosseini, he says;

What I began writing in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, I found myself thinking about the resilient woman over and over. There is no woman that I met in Kabul inspired either Laila or Mariam; faces or stories were always with me, and a good part of my inspiration for this novel came from their collective spirit. (Maurya, 2015: 327)

Afghan woman position in the Third World scene is based on the structures of traditions, culture, religion, family, policy and caste. The influence of these factors on Afghan women's lives is sure to highlight the difference from the principles of the Western feminism, which categorizes the basic complexities that distinguish the Afghan woman of "various classes, religions, cultures and castes" (Shabanirad and Seifi, 2015: 245). Gender equality is shaped primarily by the traditional and communal Afghan patriarchal basis, which precludes women as inferior on principle. Shabanirad and Seifi (2015) state in their article:

The position of women in Afghanistan has traditionally been inferior to that of men. This position has varied according to age, socio-cultural norms, and ethnicity. In fact, Afghan women, even until the beginning of the 20th century were the slaves of their father, husband, father-in-law, and elder brother. Her most valued characteristic was silence and obedience. (245)

As seen from the lines, the "perfect wife" is the one who stays as a slave to her husband, just like one of his belongings, over whom the control must be readily respected. Gordan and Almutairi (2013) agree with the idea as they say

One of the most prevalent pictures of the perfect Afghan wife in the Afghan community portrayed in the novel is the role as the slave to her husband and his family members. A good wife must belong to the belongings of her husband, who in all angels is considered to be her boss. He controls her with regards to her activities and even ideas. Preferably a wife must spend her whole life to satisfy her husband, and wish for the best things in his lifestyle for him. (243)

Dominating patriarchal mindset dictates that she dismisses her education background and ideology and that she satisfies her husband and relatives as a wife and as a reproduction device. She is expected to sacrifice her life and accept new ways of lives imposed on her by patriarchal masters. Hosseini clarifies several circles



involved in the oppression of women. Administrative structure witnessed colonizers and a series of invasions of power transitions, which led to the abolition of women rights. The exclusion of woman from education, employment and social activities reduced them as insignificant beings that are dependent on their husbands. The rule of the Taliban, imposing the Islamic regime, used the traditional and religious thoughts as opportunities for further oppression on women. Burqa-clad women symbolize “supreme” patriarchal rule and suppress women in many ways:

The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange seeing the world through the mesh screen. She practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on hem and stumbling. The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving, and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth. (as cited in Shabanirad and Seifi, 2015: 247)

While *burqa* lets limited sight, movement and speech as well as cancelation of identity, it provides women with shelter and gives a sense of comfort to overlook their yearnings. Thus, fears and hesitations gradually become rooted in their minds.

Traditional injustice is another factor that defines the Third World feminism seen in the novel:

Especially the Pashtun regions in the south or in the east near the Pakistan border; women were rarely seen on the streets and only then in a *burqa* and accompanied by men. ... Their men saw it as an insult to their centuries-old-tradition, Babi said, to be told that their daughters had to leave home, attend school, and work alongside men. (as cited in Shabanirad and Seifi, 2015: 248).

Hosseini vividly describes Afghanistan, a country demolished from power to power, in which no authority can successfully rule. Dedicated to withstand against the invading powers, its people, ready to sacrifice all for their political and religious autonomy, stand firm to keep traditional and cultural heritage. For instance, Babi, Laila and Tariq travel to the Red City to see “the fortress” that withstood the invasions of Genghis Khan’s grandson. Yet, Babi underlines “Afghans can’t defeat themselves” (ATSS, 133). Tariq and Laila experience the warring parties to gain the control of Kabul, the Taliban take-over, the American bombings and following conflicts of all nature in the aftermath, “... the country has been abused and traumatized by outside forces” (Stuhr, 2009, 55). Even in the signed peace agreements with the Soviet Union, conflicts ensue and foreigners flow. The last of the foreigners is the Taliban regime that produced brutality and demise of public sources. Rasheed and Mariam in their visit to the hotel hear “Pashtu and Farsi” languages as well as “Urdu and Arabic”, too, upon which Rasheed points the real masters of the Afghans, Pakistani and Arab Islamists, who are the big players in Afghanistan (ATSS, 135).

3. WOMEN CHARACTERS

The analysis of characters gives way to get focused on the level of resistance in Third World feminism displayed through their thoughts. The logicity and level of resistance are seen in the action and posture that tries to overcome societal plight and oppression through rebuilding the prescribed roles and images of women. Though these women do not reflect every Afghan woman, their perspectives and actions represent an idea that women desire to be free.

3.1. Nana

A tall, bony woman with lazy eyes, Nana is Mariam’s mother (ATSS, 4) and was one of the housekeepers who had an illicit affair with Jalil, a rich businessman in Herat (ATSS, 5). Nana is the initiator of the novel’s woman characters showing her position as the lowest part in the Afghan society. Her illegitimate daughter places her in an unpleasant situation in which she becomes anti-social in the end. She doesn’t let Mariam to a proper school, but be taught by a mullah for the education of the Koran. Her mistrust on school is evident:

“Learn? Learn what, Mullah sahibi?” Nana said sharply. “What is there to learn?” She snapped her eyes toward Mariam. Mariam looked down at her hands.

“What’s the sense schooling a girl like you? It’s like shining a spittoon. And 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. Look at me.” ... “Only one skill. And it’s this: *tahamul*. Endure.” (ATSS, 17)

She advises Mariam on the “lot in life” by saying, “It’s 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*.” (ATSS, 18).

Nana is stereotyped with her constant yelling to Jalil’s sons who deliver the daily needs for Nana and Mariam. By doing so, Nana wanted to show she could be the one who took the authority in the “kolba”,



her house, an act that can be seen as a way to resist in her struggle. As for “endurance”, Nana sees it as an ability to suffer patiently for pains inflicted by patriarchal society. Considered as a means to fight in resistance, “endurance” is showing her the superiority in facing Jalil, the proponent of Nana’s sufferings (ATSS, 18). Nana’s teaching works fine when Mariam is jailed killing Rasheed and being executed to death. In line with female resistance against the patriarchal sufferings, Nana commits suicide (ATSS, 14), because it can be seen as a logical resistance against what she has suffered in her life. In her death, she is sure to succeed in stopping oppression and agony, which is the only act she can accomplish in backward circumstances.

3.2. Mariam

The author shapes the character of Mariam in three subsequent phases: before marriage, after marriage and after meeting Laila as Rasheed’s second wife. Mariam is described as a curious girl for her father and education, who has a conflict with the mother (ATSS, 16). Young Mariam is forced to marry to an old shoemaker, Rasheed, a man who says, “it annoys him to see a man who’s lost the control of his wife” (ATSS, 244). She is a *harami*, bastard, an illegitimate daughter of a housekeeper with a low position in society, which makes her isolated and lonely in the environment. Though her father, Jalil, is a respected citizen in Herat, she is separated physically from her father’s world. The juxtaposition between Mariam’s world and Jalil’s shows how far from reality Mariam is since she does not see right how different her life is compared to her father’s. As such Mariam remains secluded due to her physical and intellectual separation from the reality.

Her naivety causes her to dream of a different life outside the one she knows. She daydreams her life at school:

Since then, thoughts of classrooms and teachers had rattled around Mariam’s head, images of notebooks with lined pages, columns of numbers, and pens that made dark, heavy marks. She pictured herself in a classroom with other girls her age. Mariam longed to place a ruler on a page and draw important looking lines. (ATSS, 17)

She even imagines what it would be like to be a bird, free to travel anywhere: “She was envious of these birds. They had been in Herat. They had flown over its mosques, its bazaars. Maybe they had landed on the walls of Jalil’s home” (ATSS, 28). Yet, her dreaming and initiation into society are not so encouraging when she faces challenges in Herat looking for Jalil’s house. A taxi driver says, “You are not from Herat, are you? Everyone knows where Jalil Khan lives” (ATSS, 29). Instead of being welcomed into her father’s home, as she dreamed, she remained an outsider and rejected by Jalil and his wives. Her return to her home in Gul Daman is obligatory, which is significant as this return symbolizes the collapse of her dreams. Further, on the return she finds Nana, her mother, hanged herself, which means that Mariam must face harsh realities; it also means that Mariam must use trickery power to remain alive and become sacrificial to gain her freedom in the face of an abusive marriage. In the marriage, she is forced to lead a crushing life from the beginning when they choose a husband for her:

“Now he is a little older than you,” Afsoon chimed in. “But he can’t be more than ... forty. Forty-five at the most. Wouldn’t you say, Nargis?”

“Yes. But I’ve seen nine-year-old girls given to men twenty years older than you suitor, Mariam. We all have. What are you, fifteen? That’s good, solid marrying age for a girl.” There was enthusiastic nodding at his. It did not escape Mariam that no mention was made of her half sisters Saideh or Naheed, both her own age, both students in the Mehri School in Herat, both with plans to enroll in Kabul University Fifteen, evidently, was not a good, solid marrying age for them. (ATSS, 44)

She gets lazy and desperate after the marriage as she is in conflict with Rasheed in many ways. For instance, he forces Mariam to put on a *burqa*, makes fun of her and abuses her many times. Mariam had never before worn a *burqa*. Rasheed had to help her put it on; yet, he insulted her when she had hard times to manage it in streets (ATSS, 66). She is subject to violence for trivial matters.

In the phase after seeing Laila as the second wife in the house, Mariam works fast to ruin her in the early days of her coming. Laila is valued as being from an intellectual and modern family, yet, she loses her family in a bombing. Mariam first considers she has to compete with Laila and, thus, blames her for taking Rasheed. She tries to reestablish her role in the family and prove her authority despite the challenges. For 18 years, Mariam has endured emotional, mental and physical abuse from her husband: “Eighteen years,” Mariam said. “And I never asked you for a thing. Not one thing. I am asking now” (ATSS, 192). When Rasheed gives the authority of the house to Laila, he calls Laila as city people and Mariam is a “village girl who grew up in a *kolba* made of mud and outside the village”. Yet, when Aziza, Laila’s child comes, Mariam



gets tolerant towards Laila, initiating somehow a bond protecting themselves from Rasheed's anger and tyranny. In time Mariam turns to be a second mother to Aziza. So, it is apparent that Mariam wants to be a part of the society as she does not want a negative role; she wants a community. Asma Arshi states, "Mariam is self-sacrificial, as well as valor and brave. She gets a role model because of her devotion and sacrifice for the people she loves" (as cited in Andrews, 2016, 42). In polygamous families it is usual for the co-wives to learn to get along because they unite for responsibilities and against the common abuses:

Mariam grew accustomed to this companionship. She was eager for three cups of tea she and Laila would share in the yard. In the morning Mariam found herself looking forward to the sound of Laila's slippers slapping the steps as she came down for breakfast. (ATSS, 251)

Although Mariam has delved into anger and humiliation, it is seen as a tragedy, however turns into as a means of her salvation; it is so because Aziza becomes attached to Mariam, which fuels her energy to stay resilient.

In the climax of the novel, Mariam makes a decision to kill Rasheed when he attempts to kill Laila. It is seen as a calculating move in a deliberate way to prove her worth as an individual being for the first time. She does not accept to escape from the country after the murder no matter how Laila tries to convince her. Mariam cannot risk others' lives for two reasons; she now obeys Nana's teachings to endure the sufferings for others' welfare, and this is a valuable chance for the first time in life that she can prove to herself that she is a woman of value with a sacrificial core.

The author molds the incidents in the aftermath focusing an affection and harmony between Mariam and Laila that get united through war, misfortune and agony. Experienced, sacrificing and selfless, Mariam enjoys her freedom in the levels of resistance through renovation by supporting Laila in her escape (ATSS, 236) and defends her from Rasheed's attacks. When Rasheed finds out their plan to escape, he becomes mad (ATSS, 238), so abuses Mariam and Laila severely in many ways, an example of which can be cited for Mariam when she is mercilessly beaten by Rasheed in the aftermath of the escape:

Downstairs, the beating began. To Laila, the sounds she heard were those of a methodical, familiar proceeding. There was no cursing, no screaming, no pleading, no surprised yelps, only the systematic business of beating and being beaten, the *thump, thump* of something solid repeatedly striking flesh, something, someone, hitting a wall with a thud, cloth ripping. (ATSS, 240)

In a similar manner Laila is locked in a hut with Aziza, which determines Mariam to help Laila. When Rasheed attacks Laila to kill, Mariam acts fast to save her life:

And so Mariam raised the shovel high, raised it as high as she could, arching it so it, touched the small of her back. She turned it, so the sharp edge was vertical, and she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time that she was deciding the course of her own life. And with that, Mariam brought down the shovel. This time she gave it everything she had. (ATSS, 311)

Mariam's decision to kill Rasheed in order to save Laila's life is a symbolic act that defies Nana's teachings to endure without protest. Now, she becomes powerful in this decision demolishing her unresisting victim status. Her selfless and sacrificing protest gains her respect and admiration in the prison before she is executed. She replies selflessly when Laila tries hard to convince her to flee to Pakistan: "For me it ends here. There's nothing more I want. Everything I'd ever wished for as a little girl you've already given me. You and your children have made me so very happy. It's all right, Laila Jo. This is all right. Don't be sad." (ATSS, 319).

She is admired in prison not only for her revolt against the patriarchy but also for voicing and raising the awareness of other women to be heard like the "subalterns" Spivak (1993) mentions. She is now ready to face death, the execution gaining the title of mouthpiece for the oppressed women. She started her life as a *harami*, but ended it in legitimacy. The author puts forth:

She thought of her entry into this world, the *harami* child of a lowly villager, an unintended thing, a pitiable, regrettable accident. A weed. And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at least. No. It was not so bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way. Not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings. (ATSS, 329)

Mariam's life could have been better if she had not gone to Jalil house despite Nana's protests, and if Afghanistan had not been ravished by a series of invasions that devastated both the historical values and traditions, gender equality, hope, and prospects of a different life. Mariam's domestic plight is out of control, which displays social political, feminist and domestic victimization from all sides.

3.3. Laila



Laila stands for the middle class Afghan woman who has a determined place, responsibilities, and ambition to fulfill in life. Through the stages of her development, her ideas, past memories and circumstances lead to conflicts and transitions from patriarchal impediments to resistance triggered by gender equality and feminism. The author prepares the readers with the images of frozen Afghan society of male domination and oppression from which gender inequality, torture and political tyranny require that women be dependent on husbands, fathers and sons. The marginalization of women aggravates her agony. Its consequences are domestic violence, cultural riots and female protests in the policies of dislocation.

Laila grows up with happiness, love and freedom as a middle-class woman in a family that holds the importance of education of women, as the best way to protect the societal values and woman's contribution for the betterment of Afghan society. When Rasheed degrades her she replies: "This is Kabul. Women here used to practice law and medicine; they held office in the government" (ATSS, 249). Having great courage as a woman, she believes the atmosphere of education. She protects Mariam from Rasheed and is brave enough to go out into the streets alone even in the times of Taliban regime (ATSS, 263). She is clever and decisive to run after her awards. Yet, she is compelled to marry Rasheed after she loses her family and Tariq, her lover, not to be victimized in the patriarchal Afghan society.

Despite all shortcomings of society, Laila is luckier than most Afghan women as she receives a formal education; it is because she is raised up in a family that believes in the importance of education. Her father advises her:

Babi had made it clear to Laila from a young age that the most important thing in life after her safety was her schooling. I know you're still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now, he said. Marriage can wait education cannot. You're a very bright girl. Truly you are. You can be anything you want, Laila I know this about you. 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 society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila. No chance. But Laila did not tell Hasina that Babi had said these things, or how glad she was to have a father like him, or how proud she was of his regard for her, or how determined she was to pursue her education just as he had his. For the last two years, Laila had received the *awal numra* certificate, given yearly to a top-ranked student in each grade. (ATSS, 60-61)

Laila and Mariam get united against patriarchal Taliban tyranny so much that this unity pulls both out of the isolation that gives them the power to make up for their limitations, agony and victimization inflicted by the social conditions. The novel gives light to social, cultural religious and political formations which pave the way for degradation and vulnerability they have to endure; gender equality, given at birth, in time dies off when girls reach the age 8, which is also dictated by the Taliban regime.

In the aftermath of one of the recurrent Rasheed's attacks on Laila, Mariam tries to console Laila through Nana's teaching of "endurance". Yet, Laila responds, "I won't, I couldn't let him ... I wasn't raised in a household where people did this like that" (ATSS, 130), which signifies Laila's standing quite separated from the majority of Afghan women, who have to stay inactive and subdued to tyrannies. Her only attitude towards the victimization is to resist and fight against in her capacity. In a similar way, when Rasheed decides to prevent her from visiting Aziza in an orphanage, she cries out; "You can't stop me. Do you hear me? You can hit all you want, but I'll keep going there (ATSS, 339). Despite the Taliban's warnings, she is resolved to do whatever needed. Considering all such examples, Laila represents the middle class Afghan conscious woman who has developed her ideology and view of life, ready to discover life's offerings as much as possible in view of the Third World feminism.

Laila's return to Afghanistan following their peaceful stay in Pakistan is critical as it is an act in terms of an idealist woman who longs for serving her country (ATSS, 347). It is also an act of resistance, for it requires courage and energy to find her way in the social, religious and Taliban obstructions. Home-coming represents how the marginalized people find their way to prevent illiteracy among the young. The novelist already hints that the Taliban's restrictions on working women cost a generation of children left uneducated since most of the teachers were women.

4. HOSSEINI'S WOMEN IN THE THIRLD WORLD FEMINISM

Through overall performances, Laila can be categorized as a modern archetype as she creates impacts on modern day attitudes. Modern archetype uses images and symbols to conform to certain motifs. Laila sets up a strong community with other women nearby and creates her own space in which she follows different discourse against injustice, a noble act that is focused on independence. She risks her life in the attainment of her goals; fear and threats do not intimidate her from her quest. Although Mariam is seen as



traditional and subsumed to the role, she acts honorably and selflessly to protect the lives of the young characters in the novel, and act which is seen close to a heroic archetype. They both risk their lives and do not allow others to hold them back from going after freedom. Thus, their acts can be considered as heroic as they endanger their lives to escape bondage. Further, just like "picara" characters in the picaresque writing style, they necessarily resort to untraditional techniques such as manipulation and trickery to reach their goals under all conditions. Trickery and manipulation are applied to stay alive in a patriarchal society in order to stay hopeful and encourage others to battle against oppressive forces.

Hosseini places women characters in the frame of heroic archetype that undergoes a process of transformation through various stages such as departure from traditional restrictions, initiation into new forms of life and returns to realize hopes and responsibilities. Laila, in this way, fits into the model of heroic archetype. She forms a new identity much contrary to the prescribed roles imposed on her by conforming to Babi's advice to continue her education. She takes strides to make her dreams a reality by insistently receiving education, painlessly enduring abusive relationships to protect others, as Mariam does, and reconstructing a new identity after her return from Pakistan. Her self-awareness and determination, heroic perceptions of life rank her quite extraordinary in overall Afghan women perception. So Laila and Mariam remain as modern archetypes in the formation of modern women in a backward nation. They are modern in the western sense, as they attempt to break away from their bonds, roles or fates and delve into new callings of duty in sacrifices. Heroic acts are widely associated with a masculine feature in many less developed countries; thus, both women's deeds place them into more admirable positions as they act selflessly for the needy, which should be seen from the perspective that women are more sacrificial in drastic conditions because they are life-giver by nature.

Hosseini in his novel underlines his task of cherishing hopes for the oppressed women in order to make them revolt and fight for the rights they lost after the 1990s. There are historical references to the old days when Afghan women were active in professional, familial and societal tasks. He instigates slices of hopes through the characterization of Laila and Mariam so that they should rise and act to pursue their dreams instead of merely daydreaming about an alternative life. Laila believes in miracles in marriages based on love by falling in love with Tariq instead of being forced into marriage by family. She also believes in the healing benefits of happy families in the attainment of goals instead of remaining complacent and losing the chances for a better life. Further, Laila's having sexual relations with her lifelong suitor Tariq and exchanging love letters committed in secrets show women determination to run after their dreams in happily-wed families, a necessary stone in the foundation of a nation to get out social deadlocks.

The author draws a quite unusual description of freedom for women characters, particularly for Mariam. Freedom is described to be free from servitude, constraints and inhibition. Yet "freedom" means a heavy task for Mariam as she finds it in physical and emotional death for, Laila until she reunites with Tariq. Mariam willingly accepts death as she knows this is her only way to reach freedom in her capacity as an uneducated and illegitimate child dejected in a small town. Thus, her silently walking to execution is a symbolic act for a helpless woman who struggles for freedom. As for Laila, freedom lies in returning from Pakistan and resuming her function as a productive woman for the betterment of society.

5. CONCLUSION

Set in Afghanistan, Hosseini's novel gives us a glimpse of what life must be like in a war-torn country, where times are perilous, lives are threatened and people live in fear. Against this backdrop, life is precious. When life is under threat, most people are expected to prioritize and put health, safety, family and friends above wealth and material gain. The characters in the novel face a loss of many kinds throughout the novel: loss of property, loss of loved ones, loss of dignity, loss of innocence and so forth. Whilst some characters are overwhelmed with their struggles and choose suicide as an escape from their dire circumstances, other characters refuse to surrender to hopelessness. Against grief, pain, unfairness and injustice, they persevere to change their circumstances and advance in life. Whilst the characters are forever wounded and never completely healed, the resilience of the human spirit pushes them forward to recover what they can from the broken pieces of their lives. Yet, in the novel, Hosseini shows the healing power of the human heart and its capacity to get through hardships towards inner peace and supports a great contribution into the resilience of the characters. For his reason, these characters in the novel can be called heroes, as they have suffered a lot for the aims in their hearts. Although the ways of resilience may be different, be it obedience to sufferings or disobedience to their fates, they are called "heroic archetypes" as they well fit into descriptions and as they function in the feminist principles cited by Kristeva, Jardin and Blake (1981), who point out that women who settle for division in a society where men are considered superior have to create challenges as they demand recognition by showing the society that all people deserve



equal opportunities. The women know that they have roles and responsibilities; they also have dreams and ambitions. The author depicts societal conditions in Afghanistan out for war and conflicts and that these conditions have impacted on the women, their aspirations and dreams. The women face adversity in their bondage and oppression, yet, using traditional and untraditional techniques, they walk on to their freedom. Hosseini, in an effective way, inflicts hope, as a common principle to rely on to achieve the dreams. In this regard, the novelist here wants to show readers that individuals have to strive for happiness as long as they retain hope and power for struggle especially in the backward countries.

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