



Venture of Psychological Victims in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract- This paper endeavours to examine the issues of cultural collision, cultural dislocation, infrastructure collapse, political instability, and displacement of characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* of Khaled Hosseini. It also focuses on the impact of diversity of cultures, languages, places, migration, and exile on men and women living in the colonized societies. Dislocation in this study refers to physical and psychological displacement experienced by the protagonist of Hosseini. It also explores the struggles, conflicts, and cultural dislocations, psychological traumas of men and women depicted in this novel. The personal experiences of his characters reflect the political circumstances which they encounter, and the effect of cultural collisions on their vision, love, sex, marriage, and identity. The primary focus of the study is on the themes of oppression and victimization, disorientation and cultural dislocation.

Keywords: Culture, Dislocation, Collision, Conflicts, Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

The Afghan-born American writer, **Khaled Hosseini** is well-known for his eloquent representation of Afghanistan in his novels. He explores the concern for the subalterns, the philosophy about exile and home, and the themes about homelessness, cultural dislocation, and poignant diasporic experiences. The socio-cultural perspective helps to examine the different cross-currents and ethnic pluralities analysed in the postcolonial fiction. He examines the problems of the migrants who suffer displacement, marginalization, and dispossession. From the psychoanalytical perspective the protagonists suffer rootlessness, fragmentation, and alienation in their life. He vividly describes the scenes of cultural collision, the destruction of art and culture by the Taliban, the scene of hurling stones at the adulterers by the crowd till the death of the victims. Hosseini visualizes the scene of tossing the dead bodies of innocent people and tossed them into the trucks. He has highlighted the brutality of the Taliban in simple and effective language.

Hosseini created his place with the grand success of his novel *The Kite Runner*. He was encouraged and his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* appeared. His focus is on the predicament of Afghan women who became victim of patriarchal oppression and male hegemony. Hosseini gives the history of two generations of people who encounter cultural dislocation, displacement, and violence. The plot is packed with the episodes of violence, fear, and war. He has two objectives in his mind: in his novels he is seriously depicting the impacts of Afghan conflicts on the life and thoughts of people.

The novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, uses the political backdrop of Afghan society to narrate a domestic tale about the plight of women in an oppressive culture. The Taliban culture destroyed the identity of women; men like Rasheed were encouraged to torment women. It also traces the socio-political and cultural history of Afghanistan. The image of a battered country is significant in this novel. Laila and Mariam lead a battered life; their lives are disrupted and disintegrated. Laila and Mariam desperately struggle to get freedom from male domination. Hosseini uses the friendship of Mariam and Laila as a tool to fight against the oppressive forces. In *Reading Khaled Hosseini*, Rebecca Stuhlsays:

Hosseini is a cultural theorist of the post-colonial era. His novels depict the traumatic experiences of the people caught in the web of cultural collision. His stories are quite compelling and the language is quite bewitching. He questions assumptions that break and disrupt the lives of women. He gives details of history, culture, and daily life in Afghanistan. (77-78)



In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Nana is enslaved by Jalil who is a rich businessman of Heart. Nana is psychologically tortured by Jalil. He does not bother, there is no scene of physical assault, but she always feels deeper wounds in her soul. Nana warns Mariam to be careful and should never trust him blindly since he is a stone hearted person. Nana is forced to live in a poor and improvised kolba far away from the main town. Nana lives alone with her daughter Mariam. Mullah Faizullah, a religious tutor comes once a week to teach Mariam to read and to tutor her in Koran recitations. Nana leads a life of alienation with her daughter; she has no charm in life except the future of her daughter. She is bitter; emotionally unstable because of her guilt in having sexual relations with Jalil. She could never imagine that she would be forced to live in a small hut with no future of life. She is subjected to rejection, abandonment, and segregation. Jalil does not allow her to live with him since he has other wives. He is rich but coward; she is full of morbidity and frustration. Nana never sent her daughter to school; she was a poor lady as she depended on the weekly money given by Jalil. Mariam is also a victim of indifference of her father. She lives with a void; she loves her father but she is shocked to know that her father was a great hypocrite. Mariam never got any affection, she felt lonely friendless. She spent most of her time on the bank of a river brooding and imagining the golden days of life. Mariam waited for the Thursday because on this day her father would visit them. He would bring some gifts and would give her false dreams of life. She would pass other week waiting for the next Thursday. Ironically, Mariam loved her father; didn't know the real cause of their separation and the reason of her mother leading a lonely life. Nana always ridiculed Jalil warning Mariam that his love for her is false and frivolous. Jalil visited them just to atone for the sin of his sexual oppression. Nana warns Mariam of Jalil who is very cruel from the core of his heart.

Mariam and Laila discover that 'they were not enemies any longer' (224). Mariam disobeyed her mother on her fifteenth birthday and visited Heart to meet her father alone. She ignored all the warnings of her mother. Mariam had a rosy picture of her father as she imagined a warm welcome in her father's mansion. She liked the city and wished to go to the cinema hall with her father. She felt free like other children and quite excited. She wanted to remind her father of the promise of going to the cinema on her birthday. Nana had threatened her that she would commit suicide if she went to Heart. When Mariam reached Heart, she was given a shabby treatment. Her father didn't come to receive her. All her dreams were shattered when she was confronted the reality and cruelty of her father. Mariam had to sleep outside her house like discarded item. Mariam for the first time learnt the reality about her father who wore a mask of love and honesty. She cursed herself and recollected the words of her mother. But it was too late; her sensitive heart broke but she was helpless. She was shocked to know the death of her mother who committed suicide as she had disobeyed her. Mariam is thrown into a cage of Rasheed where she will suffer eternal damnation. She hopes that Jalil will look after her but he is quite unconcerned staring at the pitcher. Jalil is ashamed of his crime but he has no courage to speak to his wives. Nana is the victim of the oppression of Jalil who ruined her forever. He was her husband only in name but in reality she had her daughter in the world. She led a lonely married life. She does not want her daughter to suffer marginalization.

Nana is sexually oppressed by Jalil who is a rich man of Heart. She silently suffers because the society is cruel to her. She is not given any identity and is allowed to suffer alone in a small cottage. She is financially wretched and has to depend on the weekly support of Jalil. She has to bear the humiliations of society as the family of Jalil does not accept her. She is so much depressed that she commits suicide in seclusion under emotional breakdown. Her death exposes the oppression of patriarchal society and false morality and Afghan culture that don't allow right to life to the abandoned women. Mariam recollects the words of her mother: 'there is only one skill a woman. She must have tahamul. Endure' (17). The real cruel self of Rasheed comes on the surface when Mariam cannot give birth to her babies. Rasheed sinks into hatred and contempt; he beats her mercilessly. She sees the lower middle class living in crowded areas and in Rashid's house, Mariam sees 'pots and pans and a pressure cooker' (53). Her husband Rasheed is bitter, cruel, insensitive, and orthodox. Rasheed is rigid patriarch who uses all tools to subjugate and dehumanize Mariam. Sushmita Banerjee has lashed at the orthodox patriarch of Pakistan.

Hosseini has depicted the plight of women in all his novels. Women are forced to obey their husbands; tolerate their oppression. The Taliban laws reduced them to child bearing machines (26). When Mariam suffers repeated miscarriages, Rasheed assumes the form of a cruel monster tormenting and torturing innocent Mariam. His orthodox mind set is depicted thus: 'The women come uncovered; they talk to me directly, look me in the eye without shame. They wear makeup and skirts that show their knees' (63). Rasheed believes in patriarchal oppression as he warns her:

Remember Mariam I am of a different breed and you cannot understand me from where I come from?



Nobody knows from where I come from and why have I come from? You must remember that the face of a woman only belongs to her husband only. Do you understand? (69).

Mariam is docile and very submissive by nature. She obeys her husband and agrees to wear a *burqa* to please her husband. The wearing of *burqa* symbolizes her slavish existence and loss of vision. Rasheed is an orthodox Muslim; uneducated and belonging to a labor class. His mindset is narrow as he uses physical violence to torture Mariam. Rasheed does not love Mariam; he only wants her to give birth to a son. Mariam is oppressed; she is locked in a dark room to suffer pain and misery. Mariam is beaten; her hair is pulled and is beaten mercilessly. All women Nana, Mariam and Laila are beaten; raped and sexually assaulted. They are given physical and psychological torments. They are oppressed by patriarchy, terrorism, and religious fanaticism of the Taliban. Laila loses her family and lover because of Taliban terrorism. Laila loses Tariq and her parents in the political unrest of Afghanistan. They were packing things but their car was blasted by a bomb and her parents were killed on the spot. Taliban brought the gun culture in Afghanistan for the first time. They passed very strict laws and banned all sorts of entertainment. Nobody could conduct music concert, writing of books and watching films was banned. The real threat was to young girls as the Taliban degraded all people. Tariq narrates to Laila of a person who had been publicly Hugged for his love for paintings. Mariam is also neglected by Rasheed; she is leading a life of a married widow. She is very unfortunate girl; her rich father ignores her and her husband beats her. Her repeated miscarriages become the real cause of her sufferings. Laila is an educated girl but the war destroyed her family and shattered her life. Rasheed is greedy and selfish. He wants a heir so he shifts his love and gives it to Laila, his second wife. Rasheed took Laila as his wife because Mariam turns out to be a barren woman. Political uncertainty forced Laila to marry Rasheed as her parents got killed in war. Her fate is linked with the fate of Mariam. Both are the victims of the Taliban cruelty. Laila is pregnant with her beloved man Tariq who moved to Pakistan to escape from violence of Taliban. The sufferings of Mariam begin with the marriage of Laila. Rasheed develops indifference for Mariam; he does not sleep with her and Mariam is forced to suffer alienation. Laila conceives a child and enjoys the love and confidence of Rasheed. But this love is selfish as very soon he starts beating her Mariam develops good relation with Laila as she finds a meaning of her life. Her main motive is to look after the children of Laila and to save her from the cruel Rasheed.

Rasheed is jealous of Laila who really loves Tariq. Rasheed is guilty because he has told a pack of lies to Laila about the death of Tariq. Rasheed plans to kill Laila because she loved Tariq. The Taliban enforced strict laws which gave absolute powers to Rasheed. All rights of women were scrapped. Mariam and Laila have to suffer because of the draconian laws of the Taliban. The cultural collision begins when the Taliban forced women to stay inside homes. They were not allowed to go outside. They are forbidden to take up any job so Mariam and Laila have to live in a cage of Rasheed. Laila was brought up in a liberal way but in 'Rasheed's house she is in a cage locked to suffer eternally' (271).

Rasheed is a callous husband believing in traditional oppressive patriarchy. He is greedy, selfish, and mean and when he finds that Mariam is unable to give birth to a child he behaves in a monstrous manner. Mariam is treated as a servant; she is almost locked in a cage to be persecuted physically and emotionally. Rashid intimidates her thus: I know you are trembling! Did I terrify you? 'Do I scare you? Don't you feel scared of me?' (60). Mariam leads a hellish life being terrified by Rasheed every day. She passed four years of her harrowing life and then she realized that how difficult it was to lead a life in terror and horror. She also realized that 'how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid' (99). Rasheed was a man of explosive temperament and it was very hard to spend life with him. Rashid would enjoy sadistic pleasures in beating and humiliating Mariam. It was a routine matter for her to experience wounds on her delicate body but now she had become hard and tough. She was a fear ridden woman always sick of Rashid's shifting moods and his aggressive behavior. When she entered his house after marriage she found the house a ghastly place inhibited by cruel monsters. Rasheed would give severe beating to his wives and he was a terror in the house. Laila tried to run away from his house. Rasheed caught her from her hair; dragged her violently and some of her hair ripped from her delicate scalp. Laila cried and screamed in pain but Rasheed witnessed her sufferings silently. Rashid didn't stop, he pushed her violently and Mariam started bleeding profusely to save Laila' (269).

Mariam becomes alone with the death of her daughter to fight with the cruel world. She knows the reality of life and human relations for the first time when she finds her father a big hypocrite as she has to sleep in the open outside the big mansion of her father. She recollects the words of her mother and curses her for disobeying her. In the Bible the sin of disobedience is the main cause of human sufferings. Mariam feels guilty and is always haunted by her guilt. She thinks that she is responsible for the suicide of her



mother. She has no option but to accept the marriage proposal of her cruel father as she has no place to go. Jalil had been very cruel to her. He could have married her in a good family since he had many contacts in the family. But Mariam is hurriedly married to a cobbler who is much older in age. The political uncertainty and the rule of the Taliban is in the background of the plot of the novel. Taliban destroyed Afghanistan and people continued to suffer. Laila, Tariq, and Mariam are badly impacted by the cultural changes of society. Laila hopes and has firm faith in the resurrection of her country but she feels intense anger at the sight of the war lords walking away scot-free.

Mariam is caught in the whirlpool of cultural collision; she had to confront Rasheed who represented orthodox Muslim culture. She struggled to survive in war-torn society of Kabul. Mariam is always haunted by guilt-consciousness. She thinks that she is responsible for the tragic suicide of her mother. Nana's death was not a minor incident, it shattered all her life. Jalil married her to Rasheed because her mother was not alive. She realized that fate and societies are colluding to ruin her. The first step of her domestication and victimization of Rasheed's culture is her acceptance of the *Burqa*. She symbolically lost her vision of life as all the shutters to the outside world were closed for her, 'all the shameful secrets of her past' (66). The main cause of her despondency is her multiple miscarriages. She becomes pregnant again and again but she suffers miscarriage to the chagrin of Rasheed. She curses herself and Nature that does not allow her to enjoy the pleasures of motherhood. She becomes sick and sad losing interest in life and its activities. She is haunted by her guilt and feels torn in body and spirit. She is forced to ponder over her anguish. Mariam had been subjugated and marginalized in all ways. She was persecuted emotionally, physically and psychologically. Nana, Mariam, Laila, Aziza suffer because of cultural antagonism.

Hosseini gives the animal imagery of a grizzly bear to suggest his monstrous cruelty. His physical structure with huge body and rough hair give the impression of an ugly bear. He boasts thus: 'Half the women in this city would kill to have a husband like me' (276). Rasheed keeps four wives and he enjoys sadistic pleasures in torturing all his wives like a tribal war lord of primitive society. Laila and Tariq are true lovers; they wanted to marry but the change of government brought separation. Laila becomes pregnant but Tariq has to run away from Kabul for safety. He was badly injured in a land mine blast but never lost his courage. Parents of Laila are also killed in war. Rasheed exploits this opportunity telling a lie that Tariq has been killed to entrap Laila. She had heard interesting stories from his parents who had enjoyed courtship and marriage. Her father had told her that he enjoyed the married life. Laila lived in the world of dreams as she had a romantic view of love and marriage. Rasheed married Laila because Mariam couldn't give birth to a baby and she was a barren woman. In the first year Rasheed is very kind to Laila; looks after her very well and even gives her gifts. But after she becomes a mother, he resumes his habit of physically torturing Laila. His language is vulgar and abusive; his attitude towards women is violent and dehumanizing. He uses his kicks and sticks to torture Laila. In this novel, Hosseini brings Mariam and Laila together who unitedly put up a fight against the oppressive Rasheed. Killing of Rasheed is symbolical in the novel; it signifies the end of patriarchal oppression and the dawn of a new era when women would enjoy empowerment and freedom.

In the last section of the novel, Hosseini depicts the heroic action of Mariam who is fed up with the tormenting behaviour of Rasheed. The Taliban had captured power, thousands of people were killed, and thousands of people left their home migrating to other countries for safety and security. Many changes had come in the society but Mariam had hardly noticed any change because of her own troubles. Her life had become stagnant and wooden. Mariam had become a puppet of cruel Rasheed. She was just a servant in the family; cooking food and cleaning floor and washing clothes all the time. Rasheed enjoys beating and hurling abuses on her. She had no wish and no dream. She lived only to save the life of Laila and her children. In order to rescue Laila, Mariam intervenes. She kills Rasheed in the scuffle. She is stressed not to own the responsibility of Rasheed's death but she declines and prefers sentence of execution than the life of subjugation. In her last phase of life, she is executed for killing Rasheed but she is quite at peace with her. She has no feeling of remorse killing the monster to save the life of Laila. She had taken the decision to kill Rasheed independently in pursuance of the calling of her soul. Rasheed had been a brutal animal and it was a good job to kill the animal. She was leaving the world because she had brought order out of chaos. Her killing was meaningful and she was leaving a very good friend, a very loving mother and a very good guardian' (329). Mariam is not repentant at all and she thinks she has done a noble deed in killing a dangerous bear. Mariam kills Rasheed for her love to Laila and her children. She dares to end their subservience and exploitation.

Hosseini successfully describes the cultural conflicts in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Tariq is the real victim of cultural antagonism as he is forced to flee from Kabul; he is injured in a land mine and loses his family and beloved Laila. There were thousands of young men like Tariq who left their homeland because of political upheaval and threat to life. The youth witnessed political unrest and mass butchering of the



Taliban in Afghanistan. Women became the targets of violence, rapes and sexual oppression. Hosseini depicts the existential challenges and dilemmas of the people of Kabul engulfed in cross cultural wars.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is set in a turbulent period of the history of Afghanistan when there was exodus and the Taliban had destroyed all institutions. It was a period of emergency as the life had paralyzed and evil doers like Assef and Rasheed enjoyed absolute patriarchal powers to crush the happiness of others. All the protagonists, Amir, Hassan, Baba, Nana, Mariam, and Laila are the victims of cultural corrosion. The external forces represented by Rasheed, Jalil and Assef destroyed the peace of their life. People were influenced by the ruthless world of war and oppression. Khaled Hosseini presents psychological case histories of women who are sexually oppressed and tortured by the male protagonists. Laila enjoyed peaceful life in Pakistan but when she returned back to Kabul she had to suffer the physical and psychological traumas.

Hosseini published his *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicting the political instability, anarchy, terrorism experienced by people of Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban. The history of Afghanistan is marked by death and destruction particularly during the last 30 years of prolonged war, infrastructure collapse, and restrictive political regimes. The situation of women in Afghanistan has been dismal during this period. Their status was undermined during the Soviet occupation and under subsequent regimes.

To conclude, Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the theme of cultural collision. Mariam and Laila are forced to confront the Taliban culture which is oppressing and dehumanizing. Taliban destroyed the history and culture of the people of Kabul, which resulted into rootlessness and disruption of life. The novels hinges on the clash between the culture of Kabul symbolizing decency, nobility, love sacrifice and humanity represented by Mariam, Laila and Amir who become the victims of the Taliban culture representing cruelty, violence, oppression and denial of rights.

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