
Loss of Self- Identity of Afghan Women: A Third Wave Feminist Study of Khalid Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract

The Present investigation endeavors to study the problems of non-western females from Hosseini's novel (2000) A Thousand Splendid Suns with the critical lens of Walker (1995) to be Real: Telling the truth and changing the face of Feminism. The objective of this research is to show the role of third-wave feminism by highlighting the problems of non-Western women in novels written in English. The study focuses mainly on Afghan women under the Taliban rule. The research highlights the dilemma of Afghan women based on the experience of a female character, Mariyam. The aim of this research is to identify the reasons for women's domestic violence, loss of their own identity, and sexual harassment in a society dominated by men. The research attempted to raise the awareness that women are of many colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds. It gives people a sense of equity across males and females. It fashions the mentality of men not to victimize women and influences the attitudes of women to fight against discrimination through the study of A Thousand Splendid Suns. A female figure, Mariyam, is forced to follow the severe restrictions imposed by the patriarchal society under Taliban rule. The study also examines how the identity of women is assembled and, therefore, what is the assimilation of their identity in macho societies. The objective of this work is to know if Mariyam's journey leads to the most particular crisis or if it finds hope for the achievement of individuality.

1. Introduction

The term feminism is a cultural, political, and economic movement designed for the establishment of legal rights and the protection of women. It can be distributed in three waves: the first, the second, and the third. The research study is based on the third-wave of feminism. The third-wave ranges from the 1990s to the current days. It focuses on issues such as protection and legal rights, the first and second waves of feminism. It represents the professional and economic power and the state of the second-wave. The third-wave is associated with gender, economic, racial, and social justice. Walker (1992) is a leading intellectual who stands for the precise level at which women have been plagued throughout history.

The advocates of the third-wave chose to fight patriarchal violence with stories of survival. This specific feminism redefines notions concerning womankind, femininity, gender, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity. For them, "sexual liberation", an important point of the second wave, extended towards gender identity and sexuality was conceived by society.

The innate institutional power of Third Wavers was created by Second Wavers, including women's studies programs and university magazines like "Ms. Magazine". Walker, (1992) considered one of the prominent voices, used the term for the first time in "Ms. Magazine", in an article entitled "Becoming the Third Wave".

So I write this as an appeal to every female, particularly females of my age band: let Thomas validation serve to prompt you, as it did me that the battle is far from over. Let this removal of a woman's involvement move you to fury. Turn that rage into political muscle. do not vote for them unless they effort for us. Do not break bread with them; do not cultivate them if they don't prioritize our liberty to dominate our bodies and our lives. I am not a post-feminism. I am the third wave. (pp. 39, 41.).

She stated in her introduction to, *To Be Real* (1995), "For the unification with the foremothers, there is a need to make a place for the women to show revolution. The Third Wave of feminism provides a platform for that revolt".

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Hosseini's (2000) novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* illustrates the problems of loss of identity for Afghan women in the context of the recent history of Afghanistan. The researcher analyzes how the novel shows the struggle of women to acquire an identity in a patriarchal society. To explain how these categories occurred, Walker (1995) sought to launch the third-wave feminism is not only a corollary but a crusade in its own rights. It pronounces the idea that a woman experiences "layers of oppression caused by gender, race, and class." In her opinion, women can claim their autonomy and freedom of selection and thus regain their freedom and womanhood.

The research investigates how and in what sense this novel speaks for the self-identification of Afghan women under the theoretical framework "To be real: tell the truth and change the face of feminism" discussed by Walker (1995).

1.3 Research Objectives

- To investigate in the novel, the struggle of women to acquire an identity in a patriarchal society.
- To explore the self-identification of Afghan women.

2. Literature Review

A series of investigations have been carried out on the subject of the identity of women in non-western settings. The analysis of this particular piece of fiction may be diverse in its expressions because it is related to the women of Afghan society through the third wave feministic study of Hosseini (2000) *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. According to a journal:

Afghan women are one such case who is precisely or in an indirect way fighting for their rights that fashions them into a women's activist in some way. Afghanistan carries all the moral quandaries of women's self-identity and other values together. The idea of woman's rights and values has been brought up in abstract arrangements together with the socio-political condition of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, Socio-social radicalism and religious mechanisms keep on posing real preventions towards the development of women in Afghanistan. These confines and stoppages had an immensely obliterating's way on their lives, and frequently consequence is seriously obstructing personal gratification also, nevertheless lessening woman prospects. Notwithstanding the fact that the condition of women under the Taliban government has been central to everyone's attention, yet in a few different managements amongst the historical background of Afghanistan, the desperate condition of Afghan women can be surveyed. There is history throughout the era of oppression of Afghan ladies. This history of the tenacious viciousness against women has been followed by a few academics, such as Khalid Houssini (2000) with his novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is one of them. Khaled Houssini has been dichotomizing the context of women in Afghanistan, not through the ideological plan of previously and after the Taliban, nevertheless inside the bigger chronicled background of Afghanistan (Ijels, 2018, pp. 494).

Similarly, according to Rezdha (2010), the main objective of the novel is to discover humanist values through the protagonist, Mariyam.

Another writer, Agustina (2012) argued that Hosseini (2000) desires to demonstrate and express his notion about how females are subservient and oppressed in a male-controlled culture and how to voice against patriarchy. She asserts that the internal forte of females' resolution is more than the potency of men when they act. He changed the paradigm by his refusal to accept the social construction of the notion of their weakness and reliability compared to men. The character of women can disrupt the kind of status, civil liberties, role, and involvement of females that are classified according to patriarchal culture. Thus, females' capacity to speak out against patriarchy

is classified as a feminist attitude. Unlike previous studies, the writer has a diverse standpoint.

Friedan (1963) poses the question in his “The Feminine Mystique”: Has the woman just been born to satisfy the demands of husbands and children, to prepare breakfast for them and for the guests? The third wave of feminism demanded equitable wages and also raised its voice against gender discrimination. In 1960, women represented less than 40% of the undergraduate classes in the country and far fewer women applied for higher degrees. Despite voting for four decades, only nineteen women sat in Congress in 1961.

Hook (2000) is one of the leading feminist theorists who discussed the complications of feminist discourse in her article. “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression”. She says:

“A central problem within feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept the definition that could serve as points of unification. Without agreeing-upon definition, we lack a sound foundation on which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis” (p. 18).

According to Baumgardner and Richards (2000), feminism is the crusade for societal, political, and economic equity of males and females. However, this characterization is very rudimentary, it covers all the fundamental glitches that feminists crave to address in their activism. Baumgardner and Richards go further and discuss this definition.

“It is a movement, meaning a group working to accomplish specific goals. Those goals are social and political change – implying that one must be engaged with the government and laws, as well as with social practices and beliefs. And implicit in these goals is access to sufficient information to enable women to make responsible choices” (p. 56.).

Hosseini (2000) describes the state of women in Afghanistan under the fundamentalist Islamic governments of the Mujahideen and the Taliban. Hosseini says that if they exclude half the populace from the country's reconstruction option, they cannot help to widen the scope of the agreements and improve the prospects for a stable future. Hosseini also states that he has received so many accounts concerning what happened to females, the calamities that they had borne, the problems, the gender-related aggression that they had undergone, the discernment, the being expelled from dynamic life through the Taliban regime, having their mobility constrained, being barred principally from practicing their lawful, societal and political entitlements.

Pakistani English literature is packed with such types of examples, as in the works of, Bapsi Sidhwa, Tehmina Durrani, Zaibunissa Hamidullah, Talat Abbasi, Mohsin Hamid, Mohammed Hanif, Nafisa Haji, Bina Shah, and Sabyan Javeri.

The third-wave of feminism has the ability to raise voice and awareness against the issues confronted by the females in a male-dominated society. In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini (2000) shows the struggle of Mariam against the false laws made by the Taliban and her voice against the patriarchal society.

3. Research Methodology

The research followed a qualitative research paradigm. It analyzes the data based on the theme of self-identity through the third-wave feministic study of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The study of the novel helps the researcher to examine the writing in the relevance of manner. The researcher analyzed the research by using online journals, books, and articles. For this purpose, different texts of the concerned writers and library sources have been employed. As a sample, those lines are selected from the novel that best describes the issues of violence, suppression, gender discrimination, etc., for the investigation of research.

4. Data Analysis

Adhering to third-wave feminism, this study focused on highlighting the plight of women, depicted in the selected novel. It shows how this phase had an impact on the lives of women who are present in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as well as in other parts of the world. The basic focus of the investigation is on the characters of Mariam. The scheme's emphasis has been to decipher texts from a third-wave feminist perspective. It was an attempt to interpret the role, experience, and problems of women in the relevant literature that includes stereotypical descriptions of women, inequity of women's rights, an image of a subjugated female, objectification of women, the position socioeconomic status of women, and the expectation of socially assigned gendered roles.

The narrative initiates with the central character, Mariam, growing up on the outskirts of Herat, a minor Afghani city in the 1960s. She resides with her mother, Nana, and her father Jalil calls on once a week, who is a prosperous entrepreneur, she is his unlawful offspring. Mariam desires to have better involvement in Jalil's life and requests to watch Pinocchio for her 15th birthdate. He approves but never shows up to the movie. She marches to his other house, which she has never stayed at, and is not, so she snoozes on the road. Her mother has cautioned her, but she departed anyhow. The following day, they find out that her mother has executed herself. After the burial, she goes to Jalil's family, where he and his wives compel her to get married to Rasheed, an aged man from Kabul. He desires have to a son to substitute her son who expired years ago, however, after continuous suffering, subsequently, he starts to mistreat her. In the neighborhood, an intelligent girl, Laila is shown. The conflict has slain his two older brothers. Laila falls in love with Tariq. Tariq and his kinfolk escaped to Pakistan. The day her family chooses to depart, a tripwire hits her family and slain her parentages. Rasheed and Mariam looked after of Laila and support her to get well, and after she improves, an outsider, Abdul Sharif, communicates her news that Tariq is deceased. Overwhelmed and understanding that she is with child, Laila decides to espouse Rasheed. Mariam is firstly offended and endangered by Laila's existence and rejects to have anything to do with her. Yet, after Laila gave birth to a daughter, Aziza, the two females see themselves as associates against Rasheed's insulting and unscrupulous methods. A few years later, Laila gives birth to a son, Zalmai. Then, one afternoon, after years of mistreatment and unhappiness, Laila is stunned, Tariq. Rasheed discovers and strokes Laila. Mariam slew Rasheed with a spade. The next day, Mariam yield herself to the authorities in an effort to clear the way for Laila to find sanctuary for herself and her children in Pakistan with Tariq.

Laila visits Mariam's old home and is able to come to terms with her grief over Mariam's execution. Laila and Tariq start a new life in Kabul. Laila becomes a schoolteacher at the orphanage where Aziza once lived. And when Laila is pregnant, she decides to name her baby after Mariam. Nana, Mariam's mother, foreshadows the beginning of the novel when she warns her of the future and teaches her to expect nothing from men except the feeling of shame which says: "Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman, always. You remember that, Mariam." (p.7).

Nana saw herself as a source of shame and shame after being abandoned by her fiancé, disowned by her father, and, after an affair with Jalil, incited to pay only for her error, Jalil enjoys without guilt his life. She was forced to take sole responsibility for Jalil by freeing herself saying to his wife that it was her fault, as Nana said to Mariam, "You know what he told his wives by way of defense? That I forced myself on him. That it was my fault. Didi? You see? This is what it means to be a woman in this world" (p.7). The statement shows the self-centeredness of males in that society.

As Walker (1995) states, "We want to be linked with our foremothers and centuries of women's movement, but we also want to make space for young women to create their own, different brand of revolt, and so we choose the name Third Wave".

Walker (1995) argues that to be part of this movement, there is a need to recognize ourselves. Transformation is an important part of women's empowerment. As she said in her article, "my involvement must reach beyond my own voice, in the discussion, voting and reading this theory" (1992, p. 3).

Even when Afghanistan was more liberal before the reign of the Taliban, there were men like Rashid who compelled their wives to wear burqas to hide the disgraceful bodies of their wives and to decry men who did not force the burqa on their wives. This displays when Rashid communicates of his clients declaring:

"I have customers, Mariam, men, who bring their wives to my shop. These women come uncovered, they talk to me directly, and they look me in the eyes without shame. They wear makeup and skirts that showed their knees. They think they're being modern men, intellectuals, on account of their education, I suppose. They don't see that they're spoiling their own nang and namoos, their honor and pride." (Hosseini, 2000, p.75).

When Mariam is pregnant for the first time, Rasheed is delighted at the idea of a baby boy. He simply rejects the idea that he could have a baby girl. He even begins to think of boy names for the baby boy.

In the words of Walker (1995), "One may be nice on the outside but on the inside isn't pretty". In a patriarchal society, males are encouraged to "sow a few wild oats" while women were told "good girls don't.

"For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have realized or understood feminism is to adapt to an identity and way of living that doesn't permit for distinctiveness, intricacy, or less than flawless personal accounts. We dread that the identity will decree and control our lives, promptly pitting us against someone, compelling us to

pick unbending and invariable sides, women against man, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad.” (Walker, 1995).

The novel also shows the change at the end, when the United States declares war on the Taliban. Schools re-open; new ones are even built. The research showed that how feminism removed all these rumors. The primary social and cultural influences on gender roles construct gendered configurations.

The continued injustices inflicted on women are deeply embedded in history. Now, in our times, attitudes towards women in our society have increased dramatically. Many people still don't know what feminism really means. A common misconception is that feminism is to hate men and not to have families with them. Today we can confidently say that women are equal to men. The role of women in today's world is more important than before. At first, Mariyam was subjugated by her spouse; she was depicted as a subservient figure. She had no identity, but in the end, she seems to have completely transformed into a true feminist fully aware of her rights.

5. Results

With all the arguments, readers can critically assess the theory of the third-wave of feminism. Like Mariam and Laila, the author's indicators, we can also see that women are now speaking and questioning predefined patriarchal manifestations.

Religion and culture have been misused as an instrument of oppression. Women's experiences of mishandling are fashioned by the societal and cultural settings in which they exist. Identification of the multifaceted customs in which culture and structures of oppression interrelate, generating qualitatively diverse abuse experiences, is significant tending knowledge. (Mofokeng, 1988; Phillips, 1998) which manifests itself in the context of the text under discussion. In the case of Mariam and Laila, they became the targets of domestic violence and ill-treatment. Women were forced to live in a violent and abusive relationship in a men-dominated tribal culture where every final decision was made at gunpoint.

In the end, we see that Rashid is murdered by his own wife Mariam because of his brutal nature. His bad behavior brought him to the destruction zone. And Mariam only took this step to save Laila and her daughter from Rashid because she knows that the only way to get freedom and happiness is to do it.

6. Conclusion

This research shows that the patriarchal system, which grants men special privileges, has established male dominance in society. When men are in a higher position, they have the power to control women's lives. Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* shows the plight of women suffering from a strict patriarchal society, Afghanistan.

Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a novel that depicts the predicament of females who grieve in a patriarchal tribal society. Violence against women is the most obvious thing shown in the novel.

As in the views of Walker (1992), “it is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systematic destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to

understand power structure, with the intention of challenging them” (p. 3). However, the identification of the complication and gravity of the ideological framework points to the societal construction practices of discernment, reasoning, education, and socializing. Societal movements can only be comprehended by connecting communal psychological and political notions in locales (Oliver & Johnston, 2000).

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