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THE DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL ISSUES IN “THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS”

Abstract: Khaled Hosseini presents the struggle Afghan women go through every day by discussing honour, marriage and the place of women in society in Afghanistan. Hosseini makes it very apparent that honour is extremely important to people in the Afghan culture and what others think of them means a lot. Afghan would do anything to keep their honour, even if it means they are unhappy. In both novels, Hosseini shows a number of examples of dishonour and the negative impacts it can have to an individual's well-being. According to the Honour Based Violence Network, In Afghanistan, honour crimes remain very high along with many other forms of violence against women, and are increasing as attitudes fail to keep pace with economic and social changes.

Key words: social, Afghanistan, women.

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Introduction

Afghanistan is a country that is known for its poverty, human rights violations and violence. Being a woman in Afghanistan is extremely challenging as they face a lot of violence, abuse and this is present in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. Laila and Mariam are two women who fall victim to physical, sexual and emotional abuse during the course of the novel. This abuse is suffered at the hand of Rasheed their husband.

Analysis. There are a lot of oppression including the traditional and modern ideas of: causality, education, fashion, gender, self-position, and marriage.

a. Causality

The traditional people such as Mariam and Laila believe in the causality under the laws of karma. They believe that God will punish them if they do something bad. On the other hand, one of the characteristics of modern culture is the causality based

on science. It is represented by the character of Jalil and Rasheed .

b. Education

The traditional people such as Nana, do not give much attention to the education. In contrast, the modern people such as Hakim, Laila, and Zaman, appreciate the importance of education as a tool for the development of science and technology. ¹

For example;

“Learn? Learn what, Mullah sahib?” Nana said sharply. “What’s there to learn?” She snapped her eyes towards Mariam... “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 skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they do not teach it in school. Look at me.”...

“Only one skill. And it’s this tahamul. Endure.” ²

Discussion. Mariam later was in her life able to connect more with her mother and the guilty feeling

¹ Lin.W.L. Connection Among The Periods.- London.: London Press, 2005.- P. 67.

² Khalid . H. Thousand Splendid Suns.- America.: State Press, 2007.-P. 48.

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that she left her mother for Jalil only to be betrayed and ultimate suicide had left a deep impact in Mariam's life. She has always tried to protect Mariam in the best of her capability. But one mistake she did was not sending Mariam to school. That became the biggest drawback and hurdles for Mariam's growth and development. When Mullah Faizullah insisted that Mariam should go to school Nana out rightly rejected the idea of sending her daughter to school.

"Endure" the words echoes in the ears of Mariam later in her life. Though, hearing the words sounded harsh for those who are reading the inner line meaning that Nana wanted to convey is quite true. Nana knew that women like her have no value in the Afghan society and ultimately they have the power to endure the harsh treatment of the men. Later Mariam remember her mother word "Endure" which works like an ointment healing the wound that Rasheed inflicted everyday of her married life with her grief over Mariam's execution. Laila and Tariq build a new life in Kabul. Laila becomes a schoolteacher, and works in the orphanage where Aziza once lived. And when Laila becomes pregnant, she decides that if she has a girl, she'll name her Mariam.

d. Gender

The traditional people such as Nana, Rasheed ,and Fariba, believe that women and men have the different right and task. But in the society men decided every things while women were under the control.

For instance;

*"May God grant you a long a prosperous life, my daughter."*³

This quote is an effective example of irony because Jalil's wish for Mariam does not come true, as his daughter dies at the hands of the Taliban.

On the other hand, modern people such as Hakim and Shanzai , believe to the gender equality.

e. Self-position

Jalil and his family (especially the wives) are the representati ves of the traditional culture since they suppose that someone's position is determined by the birth or rank (ascribed status). On the contrary, in the modern culture, self-position is determined by skill, wisdom, knowledge (achieved status). People do not automatically get their status because of their births or ranks. It is depicted by the way of Hakim gets his status.

f. Marriage

In Afghanistan, arranged or underage marriage, or even marry with someone who has far different age is considered as something ordinary. Nana, Jalil and his wives , Rasheed , and Hasina's father agree with it.

For example;

*"You can't spend the rest of your life here" ...*⁴

was the verdict they gave when she said that she is not ready for marriage.

The wives of Jalil condemn and look down upon Mariam and treated her like dirt. They hurried married her off to Rasheed knowing the fact Mariam was only fifteen years old like their own daughter. They could have given her education and little space in their big home. Rasheed was forty –five years old a widower. They did not make the brief stay comfortable for Mariam. Thus, the three wives sealed the fate of Mariam. Women sometimes are responsible for the sufferings of other women. Rather than becoming a source of support and solidarity, they turn out to be the oppressor.⁵

Physical abuse is present throughout the course of the novel and Laila and Mariam suffer constantly with the abuse. It starts off as one violent action that leads to another and before you know it has turned into a vicious cycle. In A Thousand Splendid Suns there is an enormous amount of physical violence. Rasheed who is Mariam and Laila's husband is the most authoritative character and is always trying to control Mariam and Laila. He is the most abusive character in the whole novel. When we first meet Rasheed he appears to be a gentle and caring young man who seems to treat Mariam decently. There are no signs of him being an abuser. After Mariam loses the baby his attitude changes and he is no longer the man we thought he was. Rasheed physically abuses Mariam countless times throughout the novel. An example is when he doesn't like Mariam's cooking he makes her chew pebbles. His powerful hands clasped her jaw.⁶

For example;

Rasheed blames Mariam for Laila withholding sex. He comes into her room and beats her, but Laila physically stops him.

"No! Don't do this!"

"Now!"

Rasheed raised the belt again and this time came at Mariam. Then an astonishing thing happened: The girl lunged at him. She grabbed his arm with both hands and tried to drag him down, but she could no more than dangle from it. She did succeed in slowing Rasheed's progress towards Mariam.

*"You win. You win. Don't do this. Please, Rasheed, no beating! Please don't do this."*⁷

Though the marriage between her and Rasheed has worsened the condition of Mariam, but later it did

³ Khalid . H. Thousand Splendid Suns.- America.: State Press, 2007.-P. 115.

⁴ Khalid . H. Thousand Splendid Suns.- America.: State Press, 2007.-P. 87.

⁵ Rhoades. Sh. L. Gender Inequality During The War Period.- New York.: State Press, 1999.-P. 123.

⁶ Rhoades. Sh. L. Gender Inequality During The War Period.-New York.: State Press, 1999.-P. 123.

⁷ Khalid . H. Thousand Splendid Suns.- America.: State Press, 2007.-P. 131.

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turn out to be a good for Mariam. Whenever there was problem between Laila and Rasheed, Mariam used to pay for it. One fateful night when Rasheed was beating Mariam with belt, Lalia came up in rescue of Mariam:

When Laila enters in the life of Mariam, she was already hardened and was just living life without any meaning. Lalia is different from Mariam. She is educated and quite confident with her thinking as well as her body. When she agreed to marry Rasheed, she was only fourteen and completely aware what she is asking for in the marriage. She wanted to protect the child that was conceived out of the wedlock with her beloved Tariq. She knew very well that without her parents and her beloved she will have hard time living alone in Kabul. Laila became a companion in bearing the physical, psychological and sexual torture of Rasheed.

The whole episode had a great impact upon Laila as well as Mariam. Mariam for the first time in her life found someone who stood for her. Laila on the other hand stood up for someone since she cannot bear injustice. With this a new bond was formed between Mariam and Lalia, thus bringing them together, a sisterhood in struggle. Lalia tries to run away from Rasheed's house only to be brought back by the police.

The women depicted in the novel are from devastated war zone area, where people are struggling to meet their ends meet. In spite of the fact that they are not sure when the next bomb is coming, male chauvinism still prevails. Through Nana, Mariam and Laila, the pathetic inner life of the Afghan women is depicted. Mariam and Nana have accepted the subjugation and oppression and hiding their voice. But ultimately, Mariam in voicing out for Laila, she found her inner strength and for once she was her own master in killing Rasheed in order to save Laila. Women need to voice out and work together to bring about changes. One should not be a passive receiver of the crime being committed upon them. The novel ends with the hope that Laila might bring about certain changes, running away is not a solution. But fighting against the unwanted subjugation and oppression is the solution.

The main discrimination the women character undergoes through the patriarchal norms in the novel

are Sexual violence and physical abuse in the name of marriage, subjugation and subordinate by force marriage, preference of boy child over girl baby, women are not allowed to walk freely without an escort or her husband, Stereotype that women are weak, submissive should obey husband irrespective of illogical demands, Marginalization from education and medical facilities when Laila was denied medical assistant during the birth of her second baby.

The stringent social norms of women especially in Afghanistan with reference to the novel are responsible for the maximum atrocities. The oppression depicted in the novel is not necessary of Kabul only. This kind of a story of crime against women is same everywhere. Subjugation and oppression upon women is an aged old story but it is still relevant today. The love and companionship they had for each other became the source of strength. "Sisterhood" among women can be a strong weapon to fight against injustice, violence and atrocities against women in general. Women have long been silent and it is time to wake up. A Thousand Splendid Suns is one such among many works of literature that voice for women solidarity.

Conclusion. After analyzing social issues in A Thousand Splendid Suns novel written by Khaled Hosseini, we came up to the following conclusions:

1. The representations of the traditional and modern cultures are classified into five categories: ideas, activities (social practices), artifacts, symbols, and keywords. The characteristics of the modern culture such as: the rational thinking, the freedom, the right technology using which is situated with society, the achieved status, and the science-based causality. On the other hand, the characteristics of the traditional culture such as: the inequality on gender, the ascribed status, and the karma-based causality.
2. The conflicts between the traditional and modern cultures are described by the conflicts which happen within the characters in A Thousand Splendid Suns novel.
3. There is relation between the production of the novel and the social reality which is the openness of American society to allow the authors from the third world to write about their homelands or to respond to the events which occur in it.

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