

THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN THE EXTREMIST RULE: A REFERENCE TO THE SELECT NOVELS OF KHALED HOSSEINI AND BAPSI SIDWA

¹Dr.S. Sreevidhya,²Dr.B. Sridevi

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Agurchand Manmuli Jain College, Meenambakkam, Chennai – 114.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Ramapuram, Chennai – 600 089.

Abstract

Comparative Literature or comparative studies refer to a study of literature beyond and behind the boundaries. The perception on comparative approach towards literature has been fast changing. Literature is plenteous and has added from many civilizations. Numerous masterpieces have been acknowledged, discussed and applauded. There has been a considerable development, not only in civilization, but also in literature. This development has been recorded beyond the differences of language and genre. Literature has attributed a considerably to the development of a nation. It is with comparison and distinction that the growth and development of a nation is determined. Researchers can approach the literary works of multiple languages that are categorized under various genres, literary theories, literary devices and cultures to learn about a country and its diversity. If a scholar is interested in researching about literature from Pakistan and Afghanistan, then the scholar must read through some of the works of literature that are famous. This will provide a historical background as well as a literary knowledge of the genres from those countries. For instance, the novels of Khaled Hosseini mention a lot about the peaceful days when they loved family parties and kite flying. They represent each of their country respectively and have established a strong background in literature through their writings. Their writings are examples of culture studies and manifests the current scenario that has been continuing ever since the extremist's entry.

Keywords: Comparative, Women, suppression, suffering, extremism, war.

INTRODUCTION

The word comparative refers to relatable similarities and observations between languages, literatures or subjects. It is a discipline of study that is growing with age and connecting time periods beyond limits. They are self-explanatory in many ways, because the comparatists approach provides material to the analysis and findings. The possibilities of areas untouched by many are compared for scholarly purposes. This is with regard to literatures comparatively less compared like, Japanese, Scandinavian, Indonesian, Russian literatures.

This term does not limit to literatures alone and can refer to different ranges of translations and recreated texts, inspired through various connections.

Misogynist representations of men are found in the works of both the writers. Hosseini not only mentions the hatred towards women but also focuses on the need to reform their country. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan are nations that differentiate laws for men and women. The lifestyle of the people has never been transformed besides several attempts. Hatred and prejudice are coloured by men using

tradition and religion. Women are beleaguered, bartered and subjugated by men. The chauvinistic rule facilitates more of prejudice towards women, pushing them to nothingness in the name of fear and religion.

The patriarchal rule has continued to pull down the individual rights and growth of the countries. Whether the women belong to middle class or elite families, men continue to look at women as sheer sources of producing a boy. If the woman fails to fulfill, she is then doomed. Through the stories of Mariam and Laila Hosseini picturizes the political disorder in the country of Afghanistan, the national despair of poverty that is a continuing woe, small mindedness of the men and the hostile approach towards the women in the family. Bapsi Sidhwa in *An American Brat*, depicts the influence of the western culture and the need to rise against suppression. Though the two writers have given importance to the culture and heritage of their countries, they have strongly stood for women empowerment. The need to research the status of the Muslim women in these extremist countries comes in the light of the new development in the political arena of the countries. Any attempt to free women cannot be called anti-Islam. To dissipate matters and provide better living environments must be the priority as recommended by WHO. However religious restrictions and political conflicts have impacted very badly on women. They have been treated ruthlessly and have remained unnoticed to the world.

The rights of women have always remained an issue of debate over the centuries. A comparative study of the past and the present scenario of women in these two countries show that an attempt to educate the young has been tried at. The not very old incident of attacking Malala Yousafzai is proof enough to show that attempts are continually made to bring women to the forefront. Feminine lives under the autocrat rule can be said to be that of the lives of martyrs. The extremist's rule and imposition of the new laws by the Taliban was agreed by the people of Afghanistan under the pretext that peace and prosperity will be restored. But the abeyance of the country's constitution left the fate of the people, especially women in the hands of the tyrants. Women were forced to marry men of any age group or were forced into prostitution. They were denied education and

slowly the restriction grew to abandoning women from working in government jobs. They were prohibited from walking on the roads without the company of a male member. Apart from religious restrictions, they were asked to follow strict dress codes such as wearing burka in the public. This domineering attitude continued till they crept into the household and controlled the women in every house.

Women's lives matter and their education is the need of the hour were some of the initiatives of the government after the ousting of Taliban. Many women felt the obligation to be a voice of the suppressed and raised voices for the benefit of their gender. Their voice on responsibilities and roles inside an Islamic constructed country stood like an altar for the women who were oppressed. Many women realized the need to come to the limelight to fight for their future generations. Some even sought asylum in France, Canada and the US. This was seen as an escape into the world of freedom by some people. Writers like Hosseini continued to inform the world about the sad state of the people, especially women. Both Sidhwa and Hosseini have created a global awareness through their writings. Their campaigns to help the suffering have thrown a light on the real situations of the people stuck in poverty. They have always raised voice against gender apartheid and femicide. Strong writers like Hosseini and Sidhwa have always convinced that education is the best tool to shield women from the tortures of the male chauvinistic society.

Religious fundamentalism and a belief in their religion to be superior established that women must be always under the men who governed the laws. Femininity always meant that they had to obey the dictators and remain a pious and devout Muslim. The highest form of education for a woman was told to be that of reading the Quran and preaching children.

Hosseini's experiences on his visit to Afghanistan showed him the different violence's that Afghan women were put into. The gender-based violence was at its extremity in Afghanistan and women were not allowed to take decisions on their own in their life. Restrictions were imposed and women faced the tortures of the then Taliban rule. They were not allowed to walk alone on the roads without the company of their men, they had to be fully

covered by a burqa, and were suppressed, unable to voice for themselves. Their social, legal and political rights were curbed and banned by the men from being social with the others in the society. This seemed a reason enough for writing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

In Afghanistan it was easy to find a reason for a man's accusing finger. Women had to always bear the blame of shame and guilt and be always at home. She is always advised to endure the sufferings meted out to them. Suppressed Mariam, also gets the similar advice from her mother. She says that the best lesson that an Afghan woman has to learn is the act of endurance. In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, both Mariam and Laila are forced into accepting a marriage to Rasheed, who requires them to wear a burqa before it is implemented by law, by the Taliban and later becomes increasingly abusive.[16]. They endure everything and the act of transcendence of the extreme levels can be seen through their sufferings.

The battle-weary landscape of Afghanistan fails to monitor love, but rather there is a spirit of a much painful need for an emotional thirst for a loving support, an impatient need for some kind of a care, which when the characters fight to get, are in deep trouble. An emotional connection between unlikely friends, the fissures that open up between parents and children, the intransigence of quiet hearts, a subterranean connection between the parents and the children stays connected and reveals through redemption in the end. Women who are branded as Harami are shrouded by shame. Their lives are palpable, conjuring, giving the readers a slice of the daily life of Women at Kabul. The wait for the ultimate momentum for revenge can be felt right from the beginning. Their lives mirror the abusive womanhood and the reign of the indomitable men of the Afghan society. Rasheed symbolizes the repulsive men in the Taliban rule. Woman is looked down as an object for physical pleasure and delivery. The belittling of the women is well portrayed through Mariam and Laila. Mariam's shame at being illegitimate makes her unable to stand up for herself. When her mother commits suicide after Mariam runs away at age 15, Mariam is plagued by guilt that controls her for much of her life, which contributes to her tolerance at being married to

the abusive Rasheed. During her long marriage to Rasheed, Mariam's inability to have children turns her into a resentful, bitter, and fearful woman. This helps her understand her own mother better, and Mariam's life changes with the arrival of Laila, Rasheed's second wife. Through her love for Laila and her children, Mariam is able to fulfil her wish to be a mother and to finally give and receive love.

Laila, the second female protagonist, is the youngest child and only daughter of Hakim and Fariba. The absence of Laila's older brothers, who have gone to war, makes her mature for her age and fills her with a sense of purpose. Laila has a strong desire to use her intelligence and education to improve the world around her. At age 15, Laila is in love with her best friend Tariq, whom she has acquainted since childhood, but war forces Tariq and his parents to flee to Pakistan. After a few days, the bombshells do not spare Laila's parents and also wounds her. Rasheed and Mariam find her wounded but alive and take mercy on her, nurse her back to health. Laila's idealism and independence are challenged here because she has to hide the child that is growing in her. She is helpless and stuck in the war city, when she decides to marry Rasheed. Upon becoming a mother, Laila puts her children's needs first and finds she is willing to accept all the limitations which she once would have openly mocked. Through her bonding with Mariam, Laila not only takes relief of having a friend and mother figure, but also begins to understand the sacrifices that are necessary to be a good mother. She understands Mariam better and decides to follow her as an example.

There is a slight deviation from his previous style of working because it deals with instances like those of a short story. The first nine chapters are distinctively told by the father of two children, Abdullah and Pari. The narration is in his perspective but establishes a very strong ground work for the rest of the chapters. The base of the story narrated to the children, by the father leaves an unshakable pillar on which the rest of the plot is built, beautifully. The two children, Abdullah – ten-year-old and Pari his sister three-year-old, are victims of love and separation. The father who has no other choice for his livelihood, chooses to sell his daughter to a childless couple, who are wanting to take Pari with them. The father holds

the identity of shame and guilt and he suffers self-inflicted emotional pang. The brother Abdullah who does not want to part with his little sister has less or no voice because of the financial conditions of his parent. The decisions of the rich couple have materialized the poor man and made the two loving children, victims of separation.

Hosseini begins to make the story complex and morally ambiguous. The readers are left to wonder if it is right or wrong to sell away his own child, hoping to see his daughter live happily in a better place. The emotional rapport that is built between the two siblings remains the theme throughout the novel. To feel more about the pangs of separation and suffering the step mother and the disabled sister Parwana are brought to scene. Impoverished children who died in Afghanistan was very common to see when Hosseini made a visit to Afghan in search of a theme to build on.

Hosseini in an interview to NPR's Rachel Martin, tells that 'The novel began very, very small, and it began with a single image in my head that I simply could not shed,'

The image of the father selling his child since he was not able to take care of the girl remains an issue that cannot be accepted throughout the novel. The other characters built in interconnection to the story have branched out of the main story of Abdullah and Pari. Abdullah and Pari are destiny decided victims of the novel. The two young children suffer the despairs of the family, are victimized to sacrifice their love for their sibling. They suffer the ruptures of separation that is inflicted on them. Whatever is inflicted on these characters are an influence of Hosseini's travel to Afghanistan. The stories he heard from the people of his native have been given life in 'And the Mountains Echoed'.

The unwitting victims of sacrifice, separation and death are various characters in the novel. The Taliban rule was not personalized in this novel unlike the other two novels. The story is fresh with the experiences of various people who have been affected variously. The characters' struggles are largely personal and unrelated to the political turmoil in Afghanistan.

Hosseini added, "I hope a day will come when we write about Afghanistan, where we can speak about Afghanistan in a context outside of the

wars and the struggles of the last 30 years. In some way I think this book is an attempt to do that".

The title was derived from a line from "The Nurse's Song" by English poet William Blake: "And all the hills echoed".

"Whereas *The Kite Runner* focused on the dynamic between fathers and sons, and *Splendid Sons* on that between mothers and daughters, this novel tells its story through the prism of sibling relationships — a theme refracted through the lives of several pairs of brothers and sisters." — Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times*

Khaled Hosseini considers personal loss such as losing their loved ones, memory loss, and familial love to be the primary themes that have driven him to write *And the Mountains Echoed*. The separation of the two siblings, Abdullah and Pari, is "the heart of the book". Both subsequently become "victims of the passage of time": Abdullah, who is older and remembers Pari, agonizes over her loss for most of his life, while Pari is younger and able to forget her brother after losing him. However, by the end of the book, Pari remembers Abdullah and locates him in the United States only to discover that he is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and has forgotten her.

Hosseini stated, "The question is raised a number of times about whether memory is a blessing — something that safeguards in all the things that are dear to you — or is memory a curse — something that makes you relive the most painful parts of your life, the toil, the struggle, the sorrows." Thus, the combination of these events makes *And the Mountains Echoed* "kind of like a fairy-tale turned on its head". I think at the core, all three of my books have been love stories — and they haven't been traditional love stories in the sense that a romantic love story between a man and a woman, you know, they've been stories of love between characters where you would not expect love to be found. So it is always these intense relationships that form under unexpected circumstances. The relationship that is between Abdullah and Pari's stepmother, and her sister Masooma can be considered as an example:

There is an emotional tale of vengeance, between two sisters, one pushing the other from a swing resulting in a lifelong burden. Masooma

was supposed to marry Saboor, but her sister, wrecks her life by pushing her off a swing, leaving her life bed ridden and invalid. She remains with the guilt of her sister's misfortune. There are many things that justify the novel. The beautiful description of the characters, their echoing situations and experiences, their loneliness and poverty, physical ailments have all contributed to the beauty of the novel.

Alexander Linklater from The Guardian wrote, "From the moment the realisation dawns that Saboor is going to give Pari to the wife of a wealthy man in Kabul, Hosseini saturates the various layers and characters of his novel with a yearning for the moment that brother and sister will reunite." The emotional separation of the two siblings is well woven through a story within a story. The Divis is a character that is dreaded in the beginning, but is admired for the luxury and the welfare that it bestows on the children of the village. Beyond geographical boundaries, the novel exemplifies the bond between familial relationships and the need to cherish them. Dominant powers and autocratic rules have hindered the happiness of families that protected the culture and the beauty of the countries. Extremism and war in the name of religion has resulted in unjust regime and thirst for power. Orphans, victims, shame, guilt, prostitution, violent death, abused teenagers, remain common words in the lives of the people representing the extremist countries.

Prejudice has been inherited from the predecessors and welfare is completely forsaken. Women and children are portrayed vividly by Hosseini and writings on such themes have only remained a contribution to research. The state of women and children have not become favourable and their voices still remain low and unheard.

Reference

- [1] www.academia.edu
- [2] www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews
- [3] The Guardian.
- [4] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/26/mountains-echoed-khaled-hosseini-review>
- [5] www.khaledhosseini.com
- [6] www.litro.co.uk

- [7] <https://www.npr.org/2013/05/19/184191561/siblings-separation-haunts-in-kite-runner-authors-latest>
- [8] www.riverheadbooks.com
- [9] www.washingtonpost.com