



Representation of Motherhood as an Attitude in Khaled Hosseini's: *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Arohi Sharma¹, Dr. Suparna Karkun²

¹B.A. (Hons.) English- VI Sem, Amity School of Languages, Amity University Chhattisgarh

²Asst. Professor, Amity School of Languages, Amity University Chhattisgarh

ABSTRACT

Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) is based on the backdrop of the Afghan wars which brought down the Afghan society to ruins. The main characters in consideration for this article – Mariam and Baba are two very different people; one bearing the taboo of being an illegitimate child and the other being a tender-hearted man, considered less manly as per the societal norms, respectively. However different these two people may be, they possess in themselves, a very valuable quality – the attitude of motherhood. The study aims to scrutinize the novel from the lens of motherhood. It analyses how motherhood gave Mariam and Baba a reason to live for, and even die for their loved ones.

Keywords- Afghan Wars, Attitude, Illegitimate child, Motherhood, Societal norms, Tender-hearted man.

INTRODUCTION

The term "motherhood" dates back to the fourteenth century. The word has a Middle English origin from the word *moderhode*, *moderhede* which is equivalent to mother and hood.

Motherhood is the state of being a mother. Motherhood is a word that was and remains imbued with a sense of goodness, something regarded as so unquestionably good as to be beyond criticism (and a state of being) representing irrefutable and unquestionable goodness and integrity. (Ross)

Motherhood is portrayed in different lights in various works of religion and literature. The story of *The Judgement of Solomon* in the Old Testament of the Bible portrays how a mother can be both sacrificing and selfish for her child; where one mother swaps her dead child with another mother's child for her own happiness and the real mother of the child sacrifices him for his life's sake when King Solomon asks her to cut the child into two.

Mrs Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is portrayed as a selfish mother who is more concerned with her social status and propriety than in her daughters' marriages with people whom they would really be happy. For Mrs Bennet, her daughters' marriages are a business deal rather than a marriage.

In Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1934), the mother Brenda is shown to sigh in relief when she is given the news of her son John's death because she had mistaken her lover with the same name to be dead. This was a totally unexpected and surprising reaction from Brenda.

The mother character Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) views her daughter Pearl, who was born out of wedlock, as "the infant model of great price" and her "only pleasure" in her pathetic life as an adulterated woman. Though being an illegitimate child, Pearl gets her mother's love more than anyone else, she is not seen as a mistake by her mother, even though she faced difficult social circumstances and got the tag of an 'adulterated' woman due to her pregnancy.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan - American novelist, a UNHCR goodwill ambassador (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and a former Physician. Most of his works display the themes of lives of people in war-torn countries; in his novels *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), both the Afghan Wars (1978-2001) are the main historical background which are intricately interwoven with the characters' lives. The graphic novel *Sea Prayer* (2018) is also based on the backdrop of the Syrian War and is mainly inspired by the tragic death of a Syrian infant refugee who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 while escaping from Syria.

Hosseini shows the bond of love in his novels, showing love as possessing the power to change lives, even amidst the darkness of the war. This love is shown in various shades, from fatherhood and brotherhood in *The Kite Runner* to sisterhood and motherhood in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Gender oppression and patriarchy are the major themes in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where Rasheed is an abusive husband to both his wives- Mariam and Laila, and an abusive father to his daughter Aziza but surprisingly is a good father to his son Zalmai, showing that he was only insensitive and dominant towards the female sex. The Taliban, the Mujahideen and the whole Afghan Muslim society is shown to be more favourable towards the male sex, always trying to keep the females in a submissive state.

Motherhood has always been seen by the society as a social construct - a mother gives birth to a child, so it is ought to be her primary duty to nurture her child and keep her child's needs before her own. But this paper will represent the concept of motherhood as an attitude, demolishing its sole existence as a social construct, as it was done in the novel by Mariam, the first wife of Rasheed, for her husband's second wife, Laila, moving from a relationship of rivalry and hatred towards motherly love and compassion; by Babi for his daughter Laila, filling in the emptiness of her mother. Hence this paper is distinctive in its approach by delineating that the characters of Mariam and Babi in the novel represent motherhood as an attitude.

OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This paper discusses how Khaled Hosseini has shown motherhood as an attitude rather than a social construct through the actions of his two characters- Mariam and Babi. The study takes his work, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) to investigate this theme. The work is scrutinised through textual analysis as the methodology and the study endeavours to bring out the elements in the novel which validate the existence of motherhood as an attitude, being free from social constructs and particularity of gender. With all that has and will be stated, this paper shall leave apertures for further research on the subject discussed as well as other branching themes. While the research works previously done on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* explores several dimensions of the work, the area of motherhood being represented as an attitude remains widely unexplored. This paper aims to answer the question that how Hosseini has given motherhood a new dimension as an attitude in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary text taken into consideration for the paper is the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khaled Hosseini. The novel shows the macrocosm of the Afghan society intertwined with the microcosm of its characters' lives in the backdrop of the two Afghan wars which lasted for two decades (1978-2001).

A large variety of secondary texts, discussing Khaled Hosseini and his other works as well as other research scholars' works on the primary text, have been thoroughly studied and cited throughout the work to make the readers realise the uniqueness of this text.

Focusing on the author as a whole, we shall look into the papers focusing on his three major novels, *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013).

"Translating Trauma in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" (2018) by Sarah O'Brien explores the manner in which Hosseini uses the attack on Hassan as an allegory for the national rift that develops in Afghanistan in the middle of the 1970s as a result of the monarchy's fall and the Soviet invasion. Hosseini conveys the anguish of unending conflict to a Western audience through the use of this allegory.

"Bond of love in the Novels of Khaled Hosseini" (2014) by Dr. Silima Nanda and Niloo Shaukeen talks about the link of love and loyalty, as seen in *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*. It is a powerful force that provides the protagonists, fortitude against the backdrop of the Afghan conflicts. They are left to find their own ways of reuniting with their loved ones at their own risk when their love is put to the test in trying circumstances. In the end, it is this desire for love that brings characters out of their seclusion, gives them the willpower to overcome their constraints, confront their frailties, and commit appalling acts of self-sacrifice.

In "The Concept of Parenthood in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*" (2021) by Samia Islam and Farhana Yeasmin, the main objective is to examine how the concepts of parenthood are presented in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It examines how parenthood gives Amir and Mariam a new purpose in life and frees them from the traumas they have endured.

The goal of the study "Representation of Afghan Institution of Marriage in Khaled Hosseini's *And The Mountains Echoed* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*: A Cultural Study" (2015) by Sadia Qamar and Rana Kashif Shakeel is to conduct a textual analysis of *And the Mountains Echoed* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by the Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini using the cultural mode of representation. The analysis, which is comparative in nature and limited to Raymond Williams' notions of cultural criticism—"documentary" and "social"—highlights the calibre of Afghan culture's depiction in the works under consideration. The social institution of marriage as described by Hosseini is contrasted with the authentic Afghan culture as drawn from Afghanistan's historical history.

"Re-reading Khaled Hosseini's Works: A revival of the Lost Afghan" (2018) by Akshay Sharma and Dr. Amitabh V. Dwivedi tries to examine the state of Afghanistan following four decades of conflict. In addition, it argues that the social and political developments in Afghanistan over the past fifty years call for a transformation of postcolonial studies and a reinvigoration of Edward Said's Orientalism. The age of Empire did not bring an end to orientalism, and it is the responsibility of postcolonial scholars to expose and destroy it in all of its manifestations today.

"Drawing the Human Face of a Homeland: A Reading of Khaled Hosseini's Novels; *The Kite Runner*, *A thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*" (2015) by Rim Souissi discusses that apart from being set in and reflective of Afghanistan's multidimensional society and complex history, Hosseini's novels are united by the fact that each character embarks on a journey that is dictated and, to a significant extent, tied to the country's volatile historical and social background. The cultural barriers that create a divide between the East and the West are bridged by Hosseini's novels. In other words, the themes and people in his works are infused with aspects of a culture that is both extremely exotic and very well known.

"Towards a Poetics of Culture: A New Historic Critique of Khaled Hosseini's Fiction" (2022) by Sadia Nazeer, Raheela Nisar and Fatima Hifsa discusses The New Historicism views put out by Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Stephen Orgel, and Robert Weimann. The researchers have intended to

observe the conflicts between diverse ideological discourses by concentrating on the period of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which saw the development of Taliban. In Hosseini's fiction, it is investigated how the author, through his novels, questions the historical narratives as recorded in political history books and how his stories function as a re-telling and a deconstruction of Afghan history as he focuses on the omissions and silences in those texts.

“When Desperate and Guilty Feeling Destroy Humans’ Life in *And The Mountains Echoed* By Khaled Hosseini” (2016) by Hiqma Nur Agustina offers a case study of *And the Mountains Echoed* written by Khaled Hosseini, of a conflict relating to the personalities of the characters in a historical tale and how it might drag on for a long time. The researcher shows in the paper that the characters' psychological states are significantly impacted by the remarkable effect of guilt and despair.

“Cultural Displacement, Fragmentation and Alienation in Khaled Hosseini’s *And The Mountains Echoed*” (2019) by S. Vinothkumar and Dr. M.V. Sivakumar with reference to Khaled Hosseini's 2014 novel *And the Mountains Echoed*, explores how the cultural and political tensions of the colonial people lead to dislocations, displacements, and shattered identities. Cultural displacement is unavoidable since immigrants must adapt to the cultural shifts that are taking place in their new country. As a result of this unavoidable process of cultural absorption, people lose their individuality and become homeless. Hosseini's experience with uprooting and homelessness causes her to have a shattered view of reality. The impression of the past, history, memory, and broken identity is conditioned by this fragmentation.

“An Eco-Critical Study of Khaled Hosseini’s *And The Mountains Echoed*” (2019) by Dr. Sadaf Shah and Pooja Kumari attempts to analyse *And the Mountains Echoed* from an eco-critical angle. Hosseini concentrates on the natural ecology of Afghanistan and the environmental devastation caused by several wars that took place in Afghanistan and resulted in overall ecocide while dealing with this relationship and their painful separation in childhood and reunion after many years when they are old. He demonstrates how, when humans continue to abuse nature, it can occasionally turn violent and endanger people's health. In addition, he discusses the various ways that nature can be kind to humans or cruel to them. One of the fundamental tenets of spiritual ecology is that nature is portrayed in the book as having divine qualities.

We shall further delve into the research papers specifically focusing on the novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

“Heroic West, Villainous East: A Postcolonial Interpretation of Narrative Structure in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” (2020) by Maryam Siahmansouri and Mona Hoorvash tries to show how particular narrative patterns in Hosseini's book *A Thousand Splendid Suns* support the orientalist discourse against Afghanistan. Edward Said's postcolonial theory is applied to explain the orientalist viewpoint that emerged from those narrative studies. The novel's intricate structure leads one to believe that every good person in the story has ties to the West and is remarkable to the East. In addition, the East creates disequilibrium while the West brings about a return to balance.

“Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a Child-Rescue and Neo Orientalist Narrative” (2017) by Abdullah M. Al-Dagameh and Olga Golubeva in which the researchers contend that by emphasising the grandeur and goodness of the West, the novel contributes to hegemonic Eurocentric discourse. They emphasise how children of both sexes are shown, which differs from previous scholarly attention on Hosseini's representation of female characters. The authors hope to demonstrate how Hosseini's portrayal of war-affected children contributes to the neo-Orientalist and child-rescue discourses, defending foreign interference in Afghan internal affairs.

“Holistic Approach to the Literary Work *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini” (2022) by Karshieva Tamara discusses the novel in an overall view, giving basic information about the publishing of the book, a glimpse over the significance of the title of the book, its belonging to the genre of historical fiction and war literature, the plot of the novel and the language and style of Hosseini.

“Human Behind Every Burkha: Sisterhood, Oppression and Patriarchal Subjugation in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini” (2021) by Dr. Shakeba Jabeen Siddiqui has the underlying tenet is that behind every "Burkha" is a "Human." Love, compassion, sympathy, support, and sacrifice are the characteristics that identify human beings in this study, and the burkha is a symbol of patriarchy. The Taliban abused and mistreated Afghan women. The concept of sisterhood is employed to free the bound female characters. It focuses on how women are treated socially, politically, and politically inferior in patriarchal societies. Women characters are more compassionate than men characters, who are shown as animals in the novel.

“Resistance, a Facet of Post-colonialism in Women Characters of Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” (2013) by Areej Saad Almutairi and Marzieh Gordan examines female levels of resistance from a postcolonial and feminist perspective, drawing inspiration from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. By analysing Mariam and Laila, the book's two main characters, resistance towards gender oppression can be seen. The framework for the paper is created by utilising the level of resistance theories of Stephen Selmon, Edward Said, and Benita Parry from the viewpoint of post-colonial and feminist literary discussion.

“Masculinity: A Gamut in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini” (2018) by G. Iynisha and Dr. K. Shanthi seeks to study the variety of masculinity and the battle to uphold the pride consistent with societal expectations. Masculinity is not a fixed identity but instead varies according to culture, time period, and perceptions. Therefore, it is always a multiple identity, a gamut, and never ever singular. The concept of masculinity has evolved from being hegemonic and caring to being rebuilt and then blurring the lines between boundaries and binaries. A spectrum of masculinity based on Afghan culture and society is revealed in Hosseini's novel.

“Endurance of the Subaltern: A Study of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini” (2021) by Sajid Waqar says that because of patriarchal views, the female characters in the book are marginalised, oppressed, and victims, and this study offers a fresh look at these subaltern figures. It runs counter to the conventional wisdom that women are destined from birth to be exploited by a patriarchal society. It has been established through means of Mariam's character growth. She stands in for Afghan women who are neither oppressed, docile, or subaltern. She can speak, she is not the underclass, and she

knows how to respond to every harsh patriarchal deed. The study emphasises the importance of female connection because only they can support one another in defying patriarchal standards.

“A Legitimate End to Illegitimate Beginning: A Critical Analysis of Mariam’s Character in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” (2017) by Samina Akhtar, Muhammad Rauf, Saima Ikram and Gulrukh Raees attempts to depict Mariam's suffering as a result of her illegitimate social rank. The study focuses on how negatively society views tragic illegitimate women. Mariam starts off with a “*harami*” status, struggles with finding her own identity throughout her life, suffers and endures as an abused woman, and eventually leaves this world as a woman of consequences by removing herself from the inferior social rank that the society assigned to her. The study examines Mariam's tenacity, challenges, and resistance in her arduous quest for a just resolution.

“Reasons behind Spousal Aggression in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini” (2017) by Dasarath Neupane and Ramnath Khanal studies the factors that led to Rasheed's aggression were the main focus. Psychological techniques were used to analyse the motivations behind the abusive behaviour between husband and his wives in the book. In order to determine the motivations behind the various forms of aggression Rasheed exhibits toward his wives, the researcher employed the ethological theory, social learning theory, and drive theory. Rasheed gets frustrated for two reasons: first, he remembers the traumatic death of his son, and second, he feels depressed since he has lost all of his employment and cannot afford to feed.

“Interrogating Motherhood” (2016) is a book by Lynda Rachele Ross- a professor of women’s and gender studies, in which she examines mothering from the viewpoint of Western civilization and challenges readers and students to recognise and analyse the political, social, and historical circumstances in which mothers are perceived. Interrogating Motherhood explores the fluid and dynamic nature of mothering practices and the complicated realities that define contemporary women's life by looking at popular culture, jobs, public policy, poverty, “other” moms, and mental health.

“The New Don’t Blame Mother: Mending the Mother- Daughter Relationship” (2000) by Dr. Paula J. Caplan states that the mother-daughter relationship can be replaced with a new one based on comprehension and respect. She demonstrates how women can have a transition to a new, positive and respectful mother-daughter relationship.

DISCUSSION

PLOT-

A Thousand Splendid Suns is set in the late twentieth century Afghanistan in the cities of Herat and Kabul. Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of Jalil, a rich businessman, and Nana, her mother is a servant in his house. In fear of infamy, her father makes living arrangements for the two of them in a hut in Gul Daman, a small town in the suburbs of Herat. Jalil used to visit Mariam every Thursday and spent time with her. One day the girl stubbornly asks her father to take her to the cinema hall which he owned, to see a Pinocchio movie. He promises her but does not come. Mariam, in anger decides to visit the house of Jalil, her mother stops her from doing so but she does not listen to her. The little Mariam goes and finds the house of her father but Jalil, despite being inside the house, does not show up and Mariam spends the whole night sleeping outside his house’s gate. Disappointed, the next day she goes back to her mother where she finds that her mother has committed suicide. Mariam is taken by Jalil to his house and there Jalil fixes her marriage with a forty-year-old widower, Rasheed, who is a shoemaker in Kabul.

When she reaches Kabul with her husband, he treats her with utter care and love but at the same time also imposes a lot of rules and restrictions upon her. When Mariam gets pregnant for the first time, he gives her queen like treatment but unfortunately, her pregnancy ends up in a miscarriage. After this incident, Rasheed’s behaviour towards her changes; he does not care about her anymore, always finds flaws in her household work and once he even made her chew pebbles in pure rage.

On the other hand, Laila is the daughter of Hakim- called Babi throughout the novel, an educated high school teacher and her mother Fariba who lives in Kabul. Laila’s mother is excessively ignorant towards her and always reminisces about her two sons- Ahmad and Noor, who are away from home, serving in the war. Laila also has a childhood friend named Tariq, whose family has good relations with Laila. In their teenage years, both of them are romantically inclined towards each other and on the day Tariq’s family had to leave Kabul, both of them engage in physical intimacy.

As the war propagates, Laila’s family also decides to leave Kabul. Unfortunately, on the very day of their departure, a missile is thrown on their house and both of Laila’s parents are killed. Laila is taken by Rasheed to his house where gradually he develops a romantic interest in her and Laila is compelled to marry him because she discovers that she is pregnant with Tariq’s child and because she has been informed that Tariq and his family have been killed in a bomb blast on their way to Pakistan. Mariam’s relationship with Laila is a strained one because she has married her husband and is her co-wife now. Laila gives birth to a girl child and names her Aziza. After Aziza’s birth however, Mariam’s behaviour towards Laila changes completely. She becomes friends with Laila and is like a grandmother to Aziza. Rasheed and Laila have another child, a boy whom they name Zalmai. Rasheed treats Zalmai like a piece of his heart but at the same time is ignorant towards Aziza. When Rasheed loses his job, he compels Laila to take Aziza to an orphanage so that they all could survive. Laila reluctantly leaves her daughter at the orphanage.

One day, Tariq comes to meet Laila. She is stunned to see Tariq alive before her eyes. She tells that she had assumed him to be dead when a man came and gave her the news of his death. Tariq tells her that they lived in the Nasir Bagh Refugee Camp near Peshawar for quite some time, where his father could not survive the winter. After a shopkeeper presented him an opportunity to carry a coat to Lahore, he went on but was caught as it carried *Hashish* – a type of drug. He spent seven years in the prison where he befriended a man named Salim with good connections. This man helped Tariq after his prison tenure ended by giving him his brother’s number and address who lived in Murree, a city in the Pir Panjal region of Pakistan. Laila tells him that they have a daughter named Aziza. Zalmai tells his father about his mother’s meeting with a stranger and Rasheed understands who the man must be. He

says to Laila that he knew that Aziza was not his daughter and he knew that she and Tariq had something. He tries to kill Laila out of anger but she is saved by Mariam, who hits Rasheed with a shovel on his head, resulting in his death.

Mariam decides to confess her crime and asks Laila to flee with Tariq and the children to Pakistan. The four of them go to Murree and lead a comfortable life until one day Laila thinks of going back to Kabul. First, she goes to Herat, the hometown of Mariam and meets Hamza, Mullah Faizullah's son who used to teach Mariam in her childhood. He gives her a box which contained a letter which Jalil had wanted to give to Mariam, asking for forgiveness of his deeds; some money in dollar currency and a video cassette of the Pinocchio movie which she had wanted to watch. The family goes back to Kabul and Laila starts working as a teacher in the same orphanage in which she had left Aziza. Meanwhile, Tariq starts working with an NGO. Both return to their homeland to give a new shape to its future, giving a new ray of hope to the future of Afghanistan.

This is the overall storyline of the novel. Now we shall discuss the relationships between the main characters, keeping in view the aspect of Motherhood.

Laila's Relationship with her Mother, Mammy

Both of Laila's elder brothers- Ahmad and Noor were away from home at the warfront. Laila's mother missed her sons and because of this she only indulged in reminiscing about them;

The walls of Mammy's room were covered with pictures of Ahmad and Noor...Here was Ahmad doing his prayers, posing beside a sundial Babi and he had built when he was twelve. And there they were, her brothers, sitting back to back beneath the old pear tree in the yard. (Hosseini 125)

and never took care of Laila. Although Fariba was Laila's biological mother, she never took to her nurturing like one. She never came to pick up Laila from school; "When school let out. Mammy again didn't show up like she was supposed to." (Hosseini 116).

When the news of Ahmad and Noor's death came to her mother, she was completely shattered; she said to Laila,

And now they're both shaheed, my boys, both martyrs. Laila lay there and listened, wishing Mammy would notice that she, Laila, hadn't become shaheed, that she was alive, here, in bed with her, that she had hopes and a future. (Hosseini 146).

During her childhood and teenage years, Laila spends years in the shadow of her mother's depression (Abdullah M. Al-Dagamsch 3).

Society has always seen motherhood as a compulsion for the female sex and upon that, mothers are expected to be perfect too.

When it comes to the practice of mothering, theory promotes the idea that effort counts for little; instead a mother "has to be perfect, because so much is at stake—the physical and mental health of her children, for which she is assumed to be totally responsible." (Ross 22) (Caplan 100).

Fariba sometimes tried being a mother to Laila by asking about her life but all of it went in vain because she did it not out of her own concern for her daughter, rather out of a sense of compulsion.

"How was school?" she muttered. So it would begin. The obligatory questions, the perfunctory answers. Both pretending. Unenthusiastic partners, the two of them, in this tired old dance." (Hosseini 126).

From all these instances, one can clearly decipher that Fariba had a maternal instinct, but only for her sons, not for her daughter.

Laila's Relationship with her Father, Babi

Babi was an educated high school teacher and was a loving father towards Laila. He filled in the void made by her mother.

Though the culture thrived with the ideals of patriarchy, yet there were men like Hakim whose perception towards masculinity akin to his culture differed. He respected his wife and daughter very much that he considered their opinion and many a times adhered to it. (G. Iynisha 5)

He did everything in his power to give Laila the love of both- a mother and a father. He made breakfast with her, dropped her to school, took an active participation in teaching Laila. He was really cautious about his daughter. When he dropped her to school on a cycle, he took extra care of her.

They rode the rest of the way in silence, except at the turns, where Babi braked cautiously and said, "Hold on, Laila. Slowing down. Slowing down". (Hosseini 114)

When Laila, Tariq and Babi went to see the Buddhas at Bamiyan, father and daughter had a deep conversation. Babi had not shown much emotion at the time of the death of his sons because Mammy was already shattered and he could not afford to do the same, because then who would have looked after Laila. He said to his daughter what he could never say to his wife,

But it broke me too, the boys dying. I miss them too. Not a day passes that I...It's very hard, Laila. So very hard. (Hosseini 154)

He too was devastated by his sons' deaths but he stood strong for Laila, his daughter, so that she would not feel like an orphan despite having alive parents. Unlike Mammy whose whole world revolved around her sons even after their death, Babi was grateful that he had one of his children alive and safe.

But I'm glad I have you. Every day, I thank God for you. Every single day. Sometimes, when your mother's having one of her really dark days, I feel like you're all I have, Laila. (Hosseini 154)

When Tariq asked Laila to marry him and come with them to Pakistan, she wanted to say a yes, but she could not because she had her father in Kabul who would never leave the place. Without her father, Laila would not go anywhere because she loved him more than she loved Tariq. She knew that she was the only reason her father was living and she could not take that away from him.

It's my father I can't leave," Laila said "I'm all he has left. His heart couldn't take it either. (Hosseini 189)

When Laila's parents died in the explosion, she felt very guilty of her actions,

My father wanted to take out the boxes. The books. He said they were too heavy for me. But I wouldn't let him. I was so eager. I should have been the one inside the house when it happened. (Hosseini 202)

She loved her father so much that she was willing to give her own life for him. The two of them had a pious and unbreakable bond which was broken by the merciless war.

Mariam's Relationship with Laila

Mariam and Laila had a strained relationship. Mariam hated Laila because she had married her husband and they had become co-wives. Moreover, Rasheed used to treat Laila with more care than her, simply because she was capable of bearing a child.

When Rasheed asked Laila for marriage, she approved for it because

Leaving was no longer an option. Not with this daily retching. This new fullness in her breasts. And the awareness, somehow, amid all of this turmoil, that she had missed a cycle. (Hosseini 216,217).

Laila knew that she was pregnant with Tariq's child and he was dead, so she took this step as a resort to save her child. Mariam, unaware of this and frustrated by the turn of events, spoke to Laila in utter jealousy,

I wouldn't have fed you and washed you and nursed you if I'd known you were going to turn around and steal my husband. (Hosseini 223).

After the marriage, for Laila and Mariam, living with each other was a difficult task. Laila tried to avoid being seen in front of Mariam's eyes because she felt guilty for marrying her husband, or in Mariam's words "stealing her husband". Every time they met in the house "an awkward tension rushed into the space between them" (Hosseini 219).

The way Rasheed treated Mariam in front of her made the situation even worse between them. Once he said to Laila,

We are city people, you and I, but she is *dehati*. She grew up in a *kolba* made of mud outside the village. Her father put her there. Have you told her, Mariam, have you told her that you are a *harami*? Well, she is. But she is not without qualities, all things considered. You will see for yourself, Laila *jan*. She is sturdy, for one thing, a good worker, and without pretensions. (Hosseini 220)

He insulted Mariam in front of Laila, even though she was older than her and made Mariam feel miserable. He made Mariam feel like a servant, a good for nothing person and gave Laila queen like treatment which made her even more hateful and jealous towards Laila.

Anything you need done you ask Mariam and she will do it for you. Won't you, Mariam? And if you fancy something, I will get it for you. You see, that is the sort of husband I am. (Hosseini 221)

She disliked Laila so much that she once said to her,

You may be the palace *malika* and me a *dehati*, but I won't take orders from you. You can complain to him and he can slit my throat, but I won't do it. Do you hear me? I won't be your servant. (Hosseini 223)

Her aversion towards Laila was so much that she wasn't even afraid if Rasheed would come to know that she is not obeying his orders what he would do. The actions of Mariam were obvious because she had been betrayed by her husband and was not being given the dignity of being the first-wife. She had frustration and anger towards Rasheed but as she was unable to take a stand against him, she used Laila as her emotional vent to take out her frustration.

A Change in Mariam

Since childhood, Mariam had faced the taboo of being an illegitimate child, a "clumsy little *harami*" (Hosseini 5). She longed for her father's love but never got it. "Jalil's rejection makes her realize that "She did not belong here". (Hosseini 44). Additionally, Nana's suicide shakes her world and makes her realize that she belongs nowhere." (Samia Islam). She certainly had all these memories at the back of her mind, which made her sympathise with Laila when Aziza was born. Her demeanour was softened towards Laila. Rasheed was totally indifferent towards his daughter because he was disappointed on having a girl child. Once when Aziza was crying, he said, "Sometimes, I swear, sometimes I want to put that thing in a box and let her float down Kabul River. Like baby Moses." (Hosseini 232)

He now did not treat Laila like he used to before and

The strange thing was, the girl's fall from grace ought to have pleased Mariam, brought her a sense of vindication. But it didn't. It didn't. To her own surprise, Mariam found herself pitying the girl. (Hosseini 234).

The strength and relationship between the two women indicate the sisterhood where apart of being in relationship of jealousy and enmity, they still felt the same oppression and pain under patriarchy. (Siddiqui 6)

In an instance, Laila had denied having sexual intimacy with Rasheed for which he blamed Mariam and was about to beat her with a belt, but

The girl lunged at him. She grabbed his arm with both hands and tried to drag him down, but she could do no more than dangle from it. She did succeed in slowing Rasheed's progress toward Mariam. (Hosseini 236).

Once Mariam and Laila realize that they can help each other and endure their daily fear and humiliation the novel takes a different turn where these two ladies show resistance. (Dr. Silima Nanda 4)

Mariam was thankful to Laila for standing up for her. Mariam developed a motherly affection towards Aziza and often played with her. She even gave baby clothes to Aziza, which she had kept for her own baby. Aziza showed great affection towards her

Mariam had never before been wanted like this. Love had never been declared to her so guilelessly, so unreservedly. (Hosseini 246)

They started doing the house chores together and shared many moments together, like having chai while chatting in the garden.

In the mornings, Mariam found herself looking forward to the sound of Laila's cracked slippers slapping the steps as she came down for breakfast and to the tinkle of Aziza's shrill laugh, to the sight of her eight little teeth, the milky scent of her skin. (Hosseini 245,246).

Both Laila and Aziza became the bright part in her dull, aimless life.

Laila had planned to escape from Kabul and from Rasheed, which she told to Mariam. She also showed trust in Mariam and told her the truth that Aziza is Tariq's daughter, not Rasheed's. She also persuaded Mariam to run away with her, so that she could also get free from the clutches of their abusive husband. Unfortunately, they were caught and Rasheed beat them till they got unconscious.

When Rasheed's shop was burnt and he was rendered jobless, he compelled Laila to leave Aziza in an orphanage. At this time also, Mariam stood with them and convinced Aziza saying,

We'll come to see you, Aziza jo, and we'll play together, just like always. It's only for a while, until your father finds work. (Hosseini 304).

In this way the two women bonded more than ever. Mariam tried to fill Aziza's emptiness for Laila in order to make her feel a little less miserable.

The Final Act

When Tariq came to meet Laila, he came to know that Aziza is his daughter and they decided then and there that they will run away, with both the children and Mariam, to Murree in Pakistan, where Tariq lived. Zalmi, the obeying child of Rasheed told him that a stranger had come to meet Laila. Rasheed knew it was none other than Tariq. He became furious and attempted to kill Laila,

He was still on top of Laila, his eyes wide and crazy, his hands wrapped around her neck. Laila's face was turning blue now, and her eyes had rolled back. Mariam saw that she was no longer struggling. He's going to kill her, she thought. He really means to. And Mariam could not, would not, allow that to happen. He'd taken so much from her in twenty-seven years of marriage. She would not watch him take Laila too. (Hosseini 341)

Mariam had suffered a lot in her marriage under the oppression of Rasheed, now the same was happening to Laila and he was about to kill her. The maternal instinct of Mariam made her do what she could never do for herself- to stand up for her daughter, Laila, not bonded to her by blood but surely by heart. She took a shovel and hit Rasheed on the head. He collapsed and Mariam thought that he must have got a lesson,

But in Rasheed's eyes she saw murder for them both. (Hosseini 342)

And so, to save themselves from his wrath,

She turned it so the sharp edge was vertical, and, as 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. (Hosseini 342)

Mariam could have easily run away with Laila and Tariq. Laila tried to convince her but she accepted her crime and surrendered herself to the Taliban, content with the years and moments she had shared with Laila and her children and the unfulfilled happiness of her life, which they gave her. She said to Laila,

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. (Hosseini 352)

At the time of her death, the last thoughts in her mind were:

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 last. 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. (Hosseini 365)

Mariam loved Laila and Aziza in a motherly way, well aware of the fact that they were her step-relations. She had always wanted to be a good mother but destiny did not allow her to become one biologically. Still her motherly love was alive and she sacrificed her life for her daughter Laila and Zalmai's sake.

She is unwilling to put Zalmai through the experience of living with his father's killer. (Tamara 5)

Mariam knew that she would never be able to live with Zalmai after killing his father, so she decided to stay in Kabul and surrender for her crime.

CONCLUSION

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a story of love, courage and the sacrifices people make for their loved ones. Bad times show who people really are. Even amidst the dark times of war, Mariam and Babi strive to keep their children happy and make great sacrifices for them. Hosseini epitomises Motherhood through the lives of Mariam and Babi, not in its naturally assumed context - of being a biological mother, but surely as an attitude, a feeling that one can possess irrespective of blood-relation or gender. Mariam could never become a biological mother and never in her life did she get to experience a mother's real love because her mother despised her existence as an illegitimate child, calling her a *harami*. Still, she treats Laila and her children as her own, giving them all the love that they deserved. Accepting Laila as her daughter was Mariam's own decision, she was not bound to have a good and affectionate relationship with her co-wife; and similarly, standing up to save Laila's life was her own decision. Mariam was not a mother in a socially and biologically constructed sense, she chose to be a mother and to give motherly affection to her daughter- Laila. In the same way, Babi was a father. He could have easily been persistent in his role of a father by being strict, by being emotionally detached from his daughter, by not showing excessive care. But he chose to be a mother, maybe to fulfil the emptiness of Laila's mother, but what is important is that he made a choice, to be a tender-hearted and loving support system towards his daughter Laila. Thus, these two characters explicitly emphasise the fact that motherhood is a choice, it is an attitude, not a mere social construct set up by the society. One can choose to be a mother, through one's actions and affection. Thus, Hosseini successfully pronounces that Motherhood can be ascribed to anyone who possesses the capacity to love unconditionally and to make sacrifices for their child, the fact whether that child is their biological child or not being of the least importance.

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