

Subjugation of Women in Khaleed Hosseini's *Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract

Khaleed Hosseini is one of the most influential and prominent Afghan American writers to exist in present times. His writings have a strong flavour of Afghani culture and customs prevalent till day. One of the common themes that can be seen while reading his books are the stories, woven with the backdrop of Taliban invasion. Afghanistan during the times of Taliban and the ripple effect that it had on the lives of the people makes all his stories very real and poignant. Another common theme that we see in his books is the subjugation of women. Women have always been marginalized in Asian countries but the double marginalization of women due to war and Afghani culture is clearly seen in all his works. This paper aims to explore the theme of subjugation of women in one of his most celebrated books *Thousand Splendid Suns*. The novel came out in 2007 and was considered to be one of the most popular books. The book revolves around the plight of two women in the Taliban invaded Afghanistan. Mariam and Laila are the two women from two different generations but circumstances bring them together under the same roof. After the initial hostility between the two of them it soon turns into an unusual kinship. The relationship is of a daughter and mother where the mother would go to any length for the daughter. The aspect of forming a family in the uncertain times forms the heart touching event for the readers.

The present paper is an attempt to explore the condition of women in the times when Afghanistan was in a state of turmoil as portrayed by Khaleed Hosseini in his novel *Thousand Splendid Suns*. The women were tortured and confined to their homes. They were both physically and emotionally exploited. The paper would further explore how the domination of men was a prevailing rule in the Afghani culture. The areas that the paper would cover is to explore the treatment meted out by the Afghani women before and after the Taliban invasion. It would further explore how the unrest and turmoil further added to their pitiable condition and the male perspective against the education of women. The paper is an attempt to depict the harsh realities faced by Afghani women, during and after war and their enduring spirit with which they face the adverse condition.

Key Words: Afghani Women, Subjugation, patriarchy, exploitation, violence and resilience.

Women have been the backbone of the society since the ancient times. Be it any field, contribution of women has always been immeasurable. But it has often been seen that women have faced negligence since the time

we cannot even recall. 'the weaker sex' 'second sex', 'marginalised gender' these are some of the terminologies that have been used for women. The reason being:- Women may lack physical strength as compared to men but the mental and emotional prowess are always the forefront qualities that a women possesses. During older times women's participation in major social activities were limited to handling family dynamics and other societal duties that were expected of them. They were seldom included in any major decision even in the familiar matter. The term women subjugation means when the society tries to make women look inferior to men. It is prevalent in all cultures but specifically in South Asian countries where it happens openly and is talked about even in the movies and books.

South Asian countries especially countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh where women are mere societal props. Since the ancient times, the culture in these countries promote misogyny. In terms of female subjugation, Afghanistan is spoken about in large extent. Afghani culture is regressive in nature be it for the jobs that women should hold or their role in the society which is limited to being 'housewives' and 'child minting machine'. A lot of essays, articles, books as well as movies have been made where this issue has been raised and talked about. The *Subjection of Women* is an essay by English philosopher, political economist and civil servant John Stuart Mill published in 1869. The essay deals with equality between sexes and status of men and women which was unusual during those times especially according to the European cultural norms. While Americans as well as Europeans have been active in writing about the plight of women, some of the most famous books have been written by Afghani writers. Some of the most prominent Afghani writers to have highlighted the issue of the treatment of women in society are Khaled Hosseini, Nadia Hashimi, Maryam Mehboob and Taslima Nasrin to name a few. This paper will focus on the writings of Khaled Hosseini specifically in his book *The Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Khaled Hosseini was born on 4th March 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan. His father was a diplomat while his mother was a school teacher. At the age of 15, his family applied for political asylum and shifted to United States. Hosseini did his bachelors in biology in 1988 from Santa Clara University. He then enrolled in University of California, Saint where he got his MD degree in 1993. Hosseini did not return to Afghanistan till 2003 when he went to Kabul to research on the Afghani culture and people there. There he got the idea for his debut novel, *The Kite Runner* seeing the kite flying there. The idea for his second novel *The Thousand Splendid Suns* was perceived after he saw burqa clad women everywhere. The resilient women there inspired him to write a feminist story about two strong yet oppressed women. Hosseini spent ten years of his life in medicine but finally after his visit to Afghanistan he realised that writing his ultimate calling. He published his debut novel in *The Kite Runner* in 2003. It was on the *New York Times Best Sellers List* for 101 weeks and spend three weeks at number one. While his second novel *The Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in the year 2007. It spend 103 weeks straight on the list and 15 weeks at number one position. Hosseini's third novel *And the Mountains Echoed* which came out in 2013, remained on the charts for 33 weeks. All his books have achieved different levels of critical and commercial success. *The Kite Runner* has also been made into a movie of the same name in 2007. Khaled Hosseini is also a Goodwill Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). He has a Khaled Hosseini foundation which provides humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan. The inspiration for this trust came to him on his trip to Afghanistan in 2007 where he wanted to raise funds for the refugees to build homes in Afghanistan after their return. Hosseini is married to Roya and they have two children. Hosseini speaks fluent Persian and Pashto. Hosseini says that he is a secular Muslim.

One of the most prominent feature in the writings of Khaled Hosseini has been the Taliban backdrop. In almost all his books, the invasion by Taliban and it's effect on the people is clearly observed. Further his stories usually deal with the interpersonal familial relationship. In Afghanistan women have been marginalized since the ancient times but especially during and after the war, the circumstances have lead to 'double marginalization' of women. The war has had adverse effect not just physically but on the mental and emotional conditions of women as well. The list of restrictions kept on increasing and it almost became

impossible for the Afghani women to step out of their homes without a male counterpart because there were frequent information and sightings about women being sexually exploited by Taliban. There has always been a stereotypical portrayal of Afghani women as submissive, weak, oppressed, downtrodden creatures who are in need of empowerment. The regressive portrayal of Afghani women covered head to toe in burqa is also one of reasons why Afghani women are always perceived as 'poor creature' or the 'lesser sex'. While the west perceives and portrays Afghani women as the weak, obedient and oppressed types Khaled Hosseini has tried to bring out the true Afghani women that is obedient, resistant and empowered despite how the Afghani society challenges them in terms of culture, religion, caste, gender and patriarchy. The female protagonist in Khaled Hosseini's books are striving for freedom in their own way despite the extreme conditions. The modern archetype of women is the actual picture of the modern Afghani women is brought to forefront by Khaled Hosseini, therefore challenging the West regarding the portrayal of traditional Afghani women.

While Khaled Hosseini was originally born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965, but soon due to Taliban invasion the entire family had to move away to United States and seek political asylum there. But that did not stop him from exploring the Afghani culture. What really inspired his debut novel in 2007 *The Kite Runner* was his travel to Afghanistan and witnessing kite flying there. What further interested him was the huge cultural shift from the West in Afghanistan where he saw Burqa clad women all around. He wanted to further explore the plight of women and present the struggles of these Afghani women to the rest of the world. His second novel *Thousand Splendid Suns* was the result of his extensive research of the Afghani women and culture at the backdrop of the Taliban invaded Afghanistan. Though he faced huge amount of backlash in Afghanistan after his books came out but nothing could really stop him from challenging the stereotypical notion that the West had about Afghani women.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a splendid book by Khaled Hosseini that is a perfect example of what exactly the modern archetype of an Afghani woman is. The book is set at the backdrop of the Taliban war where the lives of two women from two generations namely Mariam and Laila are forever changed as circumstances force them to be under the same roof, forced to share a misogynist husband who makes life very difficult for the both of them. Taliban invasion makes the life of the people of Afghanistan especially the women very difficult but the women are not willing to give up. They have their own struggles and fights to carry on. They have a lot on their plate because as it has been said before, being a woman in Afghanistan especially during the Taliban regime was a herculean task. Their physical and mental well-being took a deep toll because of the extra rules and restrictions against them in-between the already prevailing regressive restrictions against them.

The first half of the story revolves around the story of Mariam. Mariam is shown to be a bright young girl who stays with her mother whom she calls Nana. Her mother is a bitter woman because of how fate has been cruel to her. Mariam is the result of the illegitimate union of Nana and a wealthy local businessman Jalil. Jalil holds a very special place in Mariam's heart and despite repeated warnings by her mother that one day soon she would get her heart broken by him, she continues to adore and worship him. The first real shock that Mariam witnesses in her familial dynamics is when at her fifteenth birthday she demands that Jalil take her to see *Pinocchio* the movie in the theatre owned by him and also introduce her to her step siblings. Jalil makes a promise to her but never comes to fetch her. Against her mother's warnings, Mariam goes to visit her father but faces the first of the many upcoming disappointments from the men in her life. She is told that he has gone out of station for business but actually later is discovered to be at home the entire time. It becomes clear to Mariam that her father is ultimately ashamed of her and does not want to add her to his already complete family of ten children and three wives. As Mariam reaches home heartbroken, another tragedy hits her: Nana hangs herself. Mariam now remembers the wordings of her mother that men are cruel and selfish. That she had nobody in her life to call as her own except her mother. Mariam is taken to Jalil's house but she is repeatedly mishandled by his three wives. They want her out of the house and out of their lives and finally Jalil does something that results in Mariam cutting off all ties

with him. He fixes her marriage to a man named Rashed who is thirty years older than her. Rashed is initially kind to Mariam and tends to her needs. But over the course of time, Mariam undergoes seven miscarriages and because she is unable to give him a son, he increasingly becomes abusive to her and their relationship sours.

Next part of the story deals with the story of Laila, a beautiful young girl. Laila is very close to her family especially her father who is an educated school teacher. While Laila's family have lost her two brothers to the fight against Soviet, still Laila leads a happy life as a young girl who wants to study and be like her father. Laila is very close to a local boy named Tariq. Soon a romance blooms between the two of them but as fate would have it, a civil war breaks out in Afghanistan and Tariq's family soon leaves the city. Just before leaving, Tariq and Laila share an intimate moment between them. Soon Laila's family decides to leave too but a rocket bombing occurs in her house killing both her parents.

Now begins a new chapter in lives of both Laila and Mariam. Rashed and Mariam decide to take Laila into their wing and treat her. Laila discovers that she's pregnant and that the child is Tariq's. While Rashed wants to marry Laila, the idea disgusts her. But she now has an added responsibility to fulfil, therefore she finally agrees to marry Rashed. Now this is like a big slap on Mariam's face because from her childhood days, she had to share the love of the men in her life. She had always been deprived of the love, care and attention from the male counterparts in her life. Initially it was her father and now that she was married, she had to share her husband and that too with a girl who was half her age. Soon they discover that Laila is pregnant and she convinces Rashed that it is his child. Mariam is very cold to Laila initially because what she could never give Rashed was what Laila had succeed in giving him so early on: a child. It was as if the last bit of thin thread that connected Rashed and Mariam was now broken by Laila's pregnancy. Mariam treated Laila like a disease all through her pregnancy but something inside her changed once Laila gave birth to her child Aziza. She was a beautiful fair skinned girl who looked just like a doll. Rashed was disappointed with Laila because she too had failed in providing him a heir which at some point Mariam could relate to. Slowly Mariam started warming up to Laila and her daughter and an unusual relationship formed between the two of them: a mother daughter relationship. The major source of bonding between the two of them is the abuse by Rashed after Laila gives birth to a daughter. One fine day Mariam and Laila decide that they have had enough and decide to escape but as luck would have it, are caught midway and brought back home where Rashed trashes them black and blue.

The next part of the story shows Taliban's meteoric rise to power. The major brunt is suffered by the women population in Afghanistan where major rights of women are stripped. Amidst this, Laila gives birth to her son Zalmai who is born without any basic resources to Laila. While it becomes a herculean task raising Zalmai, Rashed soon loses his job due to drought. His mood and abuse worsens against Laila and Mariam. Now due to the condition at home and lack of resources Rashed forces Laila to send Aziza to an orphanage during which Laila has to endure beating by Taliban because Rashed refuses to accompany her.

One day suddenly Tariq reappears in Laila's life much to her shock and joy. He recounts all the incidents that happened and Laila discovers that Rashed had arranged men to lie to her about Tariq's death, in order for them to get married. Mariam and Laila decide to escape this time with the help of Tariq. But Zalmai soon tells Rashed about a male visitor in the house and Rashed violently beats Mariam and is almost about to strangle Laila when Mariam in order to save Laila, ends up killing Rashed with a shovel. Mariam then decides to confess about the murder to Taliban so that Laila and Tariq can escape peaceful along with the children. After confession, Mariam is sentenced to public execution which she peacefully complies. Mariam is glad that at last she had found love in form of a daughter in Laila and her children.

Laila and Tariq along with the children successfully escape Afghanistan and move to Pakistan where they get married. They decide to shift to Kabul and help in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Laila decides to visit Herat, the place where Mariam grew up. She experiences a Pandora of emotions as she comes across the treasure box that never reached Mariam. Inside is a letter by Jalil where he regrets not loving and raising

Mariam as his own child. She also finds a sack of money inside. After returning to Kabul, they use the money to rebuild the orphanage where Laila starts as a teacher. She becomes pregnant with her third child and decides to name the child Mariam if it is a girl to honour the woman who became a mother for her and sacrificed her own life so that Laila could live happily with her family.

It becomes clear from the story that both the women Mariam and Laila were subjugated by the society, by government, Taliban as well as by their own husband. Afghanistan has always been regressive in terms of rules against women: be it covering themselves from head to toe in burqa, holding important jobs, studying as per heart's content or marrying as per their own wishes. An Afghan woman has had to stifle her wishes since a long time. She could not leave her house alone. She had to have a male counterpart to accompany her anywhere she wants to go. They were never considered capable enough to hold respectable jobs and get educated enough. At home too they are suppressed by their male counterparts where they had to abide by certain rules and regulations. Afghan women were just considered 'baby machine' where their only responsibility is to produce a heir to the family every year. The men could keep more than one wife but the rules were different for the men. Mostly Afghan women had accepted their fate and carried on with their lives but after the invasion by Taliban the situation worsened. Women were not allowed to go outside their home alone. Women were not allowed to be educated or opt for higher education. They couldn't hold jobs. Wherever they went they had to be accompanied by a male member of the family. Taliban made life a living hell for Afghan people especially the women of Afghanistan. The women had to be covered from head to toe in burqa otherwise they were beaten to death. There are many instances of Taliban torture on Mariam and Laila in the story where we see how they were subjugated. When Mariam and Laila decide to escape the first time, they are caught by police and beaten before they are returned home by the police. At home too, they are thrashed black and blue by Rashed not because he was worried about the both of them but because they had tried to escape from him. How dare they defy their all mighty husband! Then there's an instance of Laila and Mariam visiting Aziza in the orphanage, they are discovered by the Taliban and Laila has to bear the beating just because she decides to visit her daughter alone when Rashed refuses to accompany her. When Mariam confesses to the murder of her husband to save Laila, she is sentenced to public execution by Taliban. These are few instances of the direct effect of Taliban invasion on the women of Afghanistan.

At the story also talks about civil war, the hardships of the Afghan women becomes even more evident. Laila becomes pregnant with her son during the Taliban invasion and she is forced to give birth to her son with the help of Caesarian without anaesthesia as the local hospital has been stripped of all the supplies. Finally when Laila and Mariam had enough of the torture by Rashed as well as the society, they are compelled to run away. Escaping home is already a very big task for both the women especially because of the terror of their dominating husband who leaves no stones unturned to torture both the women. Both the times that they try to escape, they are caught and beaten because they are caught unsupervised without any male counterpart by the Taliban. It becomes clear to both the women that as long as they are in Afghanistan, they would have to live a prisoners life in their own home and their own country. To raise the two children peacefully, Laila had to escape Rashed and finally Afghanistan at least as long as Taliban ruled there. And especially now that Tariq had come back into Laila's life, it was necessary to escape. Finally towards the end of the story Laila and Tariq successfully escape to Pakistan at least till the time the situation of turmoil and unrest is not settled. They decide to return to Kabul to help in rebuilding of Afghanistan after the defeat of Taliban.

Therefore it is clearly visible that Khaled Hosseini has brought out all the aspects of the struggles of Afghan women. Not just the subjugation and marginalization of women but also their empowerment. How the woman is tortured, how she endures the torture and slowly step by step she decides to stand up for herself. The courage comes from years of enduring the same torture by family, society and the country generation after generation. The modern woman now tries to take a stand for herself but that too takes time due to the circumstances around her. The regressive portrayal of Afghan women by the other writers that audience

comes across has finally been challenging by writers like Khaled Hosseini and Nadia Hashimi who have portrayed the actual picture of the women of Afghanistan and their lives. They are oppressed but they aren't weak. They have successfully broken the shackles of patriarchy in their own way. Like Laila and Mariam who have both tried to fight patriarchy in their own way, sometimes together and sometimes separately, there are numerous women like them who are a source of inspiration for all the other women out there still struggling. Hosseini has not just brought out the struggles and torture that the women faced but he has highlighted the other aspect of the story as well. He has brought out how they have fought the adversaries and emerged victorious though wounded which they proudly flaunt as their battle scars. Their own experiences help the other women in fighting their battles. It gives them the courage to stand up for themselves because if they can then why not others.

Through Khaled Hosseini *Thousand Splendid Suns*, we get to see two aspects of the Afghani society. In the first half, we see how an illegitimate girl that is Mariam is treated like an untouchable by the society as well as by her own father. Mariam has grown up with a lie that her father loves her but the fact is that her father is ashamed of Mariam because she is a maid's child and illegitimate, born out of the wedlock. A woman expects to find happiness after marriage with her husband but that too is not in her fate because firstly she is married off without consent just to ward off responsibility. Secondly luck is not in favour of Mariam as she faces the ultimate grief of miscarriage that too numerous times. Therefore any chance that she has of getting love and happiness after marriage is brutally snatched away from her. The worst part is yet to come in Mariam's life when her husband decides to take second wife and that too someone who's almost his daughter's age. She resigns to her fate and accepts this decision too because she as a woman has been taught to keep enduring till her last breath. Laila's entry in her life is not just tragic but to Mariam, Laila is everything that she couldn't be or couldn't have. Laila reminds Mariam of all bitterness that life has forced upon her therefore any hope of friendship or peaceful coexistence is ward off by her. She accepts her fate as the woman who couldn't be enough for her husband. Who couldn't give him happiness. Women in Afghanistan are considered to be 'child minting machines' therefore Mariam is made to believe by the society and Rashed that she could not fulfil her biggest responsibility as a woman which is disheartening for the readers. Mariam seems to be at the receiving end of all the possible miseries through her father, husband and finally the society. It is almost as if the seed of disappointing men in her life had been sown by her father through his actions. The seed is further watered and grows into a lush tree by Rashid's actions which keep getting worst.

Though Laila's entry in Mariam's life initially is a source of pain to Mariam because she now had to share her husband. Mariam initially is unable to accept Laila and allow her a space in her heart but slowly as Laila gives birth to a daughter and loses Rashed's love, she realises that both the women are in the same boat. Instead of being happy that Rashed no longer dotes on Laila, Mariam feels sorry for her. She can see that both the women are about to share the same fate. Therefore she starts feeling protective of Laila and her daughter Aziza. It is almost as if that latent mother in her has now risen. The first instance of that is clearly visible when Mariam decides to give away the clothes that she had made for her children, she gives them to Laila to be worn by Aziza. Slowly an usual kinship develops between the two women who start understanding each other. Mariam helps Laila in raising Aziza. She starts seeing Laila as her own daughter and vicariously lives her life through her. The mother daughter relationship that they build has touched the hearts of millions of readers all around the world. Mariam now decides to live for Laila and her children. She dedicates her life in raising Laila's two children. The two women now join forces to be one to fight against patriarchy. Mariam even decides to start a new life by escaping with Laila and her children. They dream of building a life together happily but alas before that could happen they are caught and beaten black and blue. Mariam now wants to live for Laila and her children. She even ends up sacrificing her life for Laila. When Tariq comes back in Laila's life, she decides to help them escape so that they could happily live as a family. The happiness, the calm that she could never have in her life, she wanted Laila to experience

all of it. She ends up saving Laila from Rashed killing him in the process. Sacrificing her life for Laila, she decides to confess so that Laila and Tariq could escape and build a life for them self along with their children. Thought she has to die charged with murder but she happily dies with her heart full of love that she had earned at the end of her life. She had never been loved by her father or her husband but she was loved by a stranger who became more than a family to her. She became a mother and a grandmother. She had earned relationships that she never expected to build in her life. When she had left all hopes of ever being happy, she unexpected got happiness and built a beautiful family where even after she died, Laila decides to name her child Mariam if it's a girl. Mariam had touched not just one but three lives and that was more than enough to last her a lifetime.

Laila on the other hand had always lived a comfortable life. She was a daughter of an educated man who was also a teacher. She wanted to study and become something like her father. She had her father's full support as is very evident from the delightful deep conversations that they used to have and all the stories that he told her. She read books from the tender age. She had hopes and dreams for herself even though they had undergone tragedy when Laila's two brothers had died in war. Together as a family, they overcome all grief and pain but fate decides to intervene in form of civil war. In-between all this, Laila strikes a friendship with a handsome one legged local boy Tariq. Soon the friendship blossoms into love and they promise to be together forever. But as they say, when everything is going great something has to happen to shake up your core. Tariq's family decides to move away leaving the city. The two young lovebirds share their love in form of passionate lovemaking. When the environment becomes difficult for people to survive, Laila's family decides to leave too but alas before they can do so a rocket bombing happens on their house, killing both Laila's parents and gravely injuring Laila. This incident is the turning point of Laila's life. It turns her life upside down. This incident not just changes her life but also Mariam's life. It is from this point that their lives are intertwined. Thus Laila enters Mariam's life from here on in form of her husband's second wife. On the other hand Laila faces another life changing situation. She discovers that she's pregnant. This solidifies her decision to marry Rashed who's disgustingly the age of her father. Laila decides to bury the secret of the identity of her child's father deep inside her and accepts her fate of now living as a second wife and a mother.

Laila soon becomes a mother to a beautiful baby girl Aziza. Now Laila is a hands on doting mother to her daughter. Laila had never received the kind of love that she had craved from her mother especially after both her brothers had joined war. Her mother used to be sad and depressed most of the times to look after Laila. All she had was her father who proved to be both father and mother to her, therefore Laila decided to give all of her love and then some more to her daughter. When Laila was pregnant Rashed showered all his love and attention to his beautiful young wife even more in hope of her giving him heir but his behaviour towards her immediately changes as she gives birth to a baby girl. As she gradually loses her beauty, she and Mariam become equivalent to him that is two maids who are supposed to maintain his household. He is now even more irritated that he has now added responsibility and more mouths to feed. Laila has her hands and heart full because of her daughter. She now solely wants to live for her daughter who is also Tariq's last connection to her. Laila now feels a special connection to Mariam who is slowly becoming a mother figure to her. They together raise Aziza. Laila experiences motherhood for the second time and this time the experience is life altering because she ends up giving birth to her son in a local hospital via Caesarean without anaesthesia. Mariam doesn't leave her sight for even once and gives her courage throughout.

Thus begins Laila and Mariam's struggle of raising Zalmai and Aziza along with the daily harassment at the hands of their husband. Soon due to civil war, he loses his job and his mood worsens and so does his torture on both his wives. He now wants to send way Aziza to orphanage because he can no longer feed so many mouths. Laila and Mariam protest but to no avail. Laila drops off Aziza with a heavy heart promising her that she would very soon come for her and give her a better life. Laila as a mother has to endure a lot of adversaries be it getting thrashed black and blue everytime she decides to escape Rashed to give her

children a better life along with Mariam or going alone to meet her daughter in orphanage when Rashed refuses to accompany her. Both the times she is almost beaten to death for being caught by the Taliban and her husband but she still does not give up and one day dreams of living a better life along with Mariam and her two children. Next life changing event occurs when the kove of her life whom she had presumed to be dead, comes back into her life. He recounts everything that had happened and wants to desperately meet his daughter. It is an emotional moment for both of them as they reunite as a family. Tariq encourages Laila and Mariam to escape so that they can together all live as a happy family. But soon Rashed gets to know about Tariq's return through innocent Zalmai and he almost kills Laila in rage. Mariam saves Laila by hitting his head with a shovel and ultimately killing him. Mariam turns herself to Taliban in order to save Laila. Laila and Tariq successfully escape with their children. Laila has tears in her eyes. She is in disbelief that someone could love her so much to sacrifice their life for her happiness. Tariq and Laila decide to run away as a family to Pakistan and later return to be a part of the Afghanistan building process.

Laila returns to Kabul especially to Herat where Mariam grew up to know more about her. She wants to experience how Mariam actually was and how she grew up as a child. She get's to know about her childhood through the son of the teacher who taught her. She also finds s box of Mariam's childhood stuff where there's a CD of *Pinocchio* and a letter from Mariam's father where he regrets not loving her enough as his legitimate child but it is too late for that because that letter never reached her. Laila ultimately fulfils her dream of being like her father by rebuilding the orphanage with the money that she finds in Mariam's box and starting as a teacher there just like her father used to teach. She becomes pregnant and decides to name her child Mariam if it is a girl to honour the women who loved her the most to sacrifice her love, maybe even more than her mother. Therefore we get to see clearly how the dynamics between both the women change and both of them though oppressed since childhood and after marriage, are successful in paving their own path and ultimately liberating themselves from the patriarchal figure in their lives as well as the society. They make a life for themselves and ultimately are loved and cherished by the end of the story.

Another oppressed figure in the story though she does not appear for a long time is Mariam's mother Nana. She has had a very tough life and her death is tragic too. She is a poor girl who works as a maid to Jalil. She ends up becoming a figure of lust to him and the result is her becoming pregnant out of the wedlock. A maid getting pregnant that too with the masters child out of wedlock is the biggest controversy that a small city of Afghanistan could digest therefore she is thrown to the outskirts and treated like a disease. Her daughter Mariam never get's the love and care that she deserves from the society. Nana has to endure hard labour to give birth to Mariam. All her childhood Jalil tricks Mariam into believing that he loves her and he would make her life better. He makes fake promises to her which compels Mariam into believing that Nana is just bitter with her life because Jalil did not accept her and that her warnings are just so because she's jealous that Mariam would one day live the life she couldn't or get the love that Nana craved all her life. Nana repeatedly warns Mariam that she shouldn't trust Jalil because he had made her life a living hell and had betrayed her. That Mariam could only trust Nana since she had no one else in her life. The only positive influence in Mariam's life was her teacher. On her fourteenth birthday when she finally decided to visit her father to confront him about the promise that he had made, Nana warns her that it would be of no use and they would never accept her. She would get her heart broken and that she shouldn't leave Herat. Nana also told her that her father was a liar and that he would never keep his promise like he had betrayed her today. But Mariam is unwilling to accept this. To her Jalil could never be wrong and Nana was just bitter. Nana cries, threatens and requests Mariam not to leave but ultimately she leaves. Nana is heartbroken that Mariam chose Jalil over her. When Mariam doesn't return after a day, Nana hangs herself from a tree presuming that they had taken Mariam away from her. Mariam was the only one who Nana could call as her own in the entire world and now that her own daughter had been snatched from her, she didn't see any point in surviving anymore. Mariam finds her mother dead on her return and realises that the only

person who truly loved and understand her was her Nana. She regrets not listening to Nana and losing her like this. Nan had a terrible life. The only ray of sunshine in her life was Mariam whom she loved with all her heart and soul. All her life Nana suffers as she never got the man she loved, she never got the respect that she deserved and she could never live a respectful life. She was oppressed and thrown out of the society to live in the outskirts as if she had alone committed the crime. She had to live her life in shame and she died tragically died in shame as well.

The three women characters of the novel deal with the oppression and regressive Afghani culture in their own way. They are subjugated, beaten, humiliated and forced to follow the rules and regulations but ultimately even if initially they have accepted their fate, they decide to slowly and steadily stand up for themselves and ultimately pave their own path. They end up fighting against patriarchy and live their life as they had always dreamt of. Hosseini brings out different elements of resistance in Mariam, Laila and even Nana. He shows that not all Afghani women want to be covered in burqa and accept their fate as baby minting machine. They would fight for themselves and ultimately defeat the system in their own way. Hosseini tells the readers that Afghani women are not just weak hearted oppressed creatures as they had been portrayed by rest of the world. They had to zeal and courage to fight back against patriarchy and form a niche all for themselves.

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