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*The Rise of Taliban and The Women's Status In Khaled
Hosseini's novel A Thousand Splendid Suns*



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*Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eye
Through the bazaars, caravans of Egypt pass
One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs
And the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls*

*Saib-e-Tabrizi 17th Century
Translated by Josephine Davis*

Abstract

My dissertation discusses the status of Afghani women under the Taliban regime and their different challenges towards women emancipation in a novel from Afghanistan written by Khaled Hosseini entitled *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The aim of my research is to depict the protagonists' Status under the Taliban rule and their struggle against social and political norms to put an end to their discrimination. Both of them are women of two generations apart, one is born an illegitimate child in poverty, the other is born to educated parents at a progressive time in Kabul's history, but they are bond together in an unexpected way fighting the same oppressor by using their kindness, cleverness and deep friendship.

Key words: patriarchy, discrimination, women's status, struggle, Taliban.

DEDICATION

I hole-heartedly dedicate this modest and respectful paper to

- ✓ My beloved parents.
- ✓ My brothers and sisters.
- ✓ My teachers.
- ✓ My classmates.
- ✓ My nephews and nieces.
- ✓ My friends.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| ABSTARCT..... | i |
| DEDICATION..... | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENT..... | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | VI |
| GENERAL INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |

CHAPTER ONE:

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS IN CONTEXT

| | |
|--|----|
| 1/ The Author's Life, Time and Influence..... | 9 |
| 2/ The Synopsis of <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i> | 13 |
| 3/ <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i> : Text and Context..... | 16 |
| 4/ Theoretical Framework..... | 18 |
| 4-1/ New Historicism..... | 19 |
| 4-2/ Feminism..... | 20 |
| 4-2-1/ Definition of Feminism..... | 21 |
| 4-2-2/ Feminism in Literature..... | 21 |
| 4-2-3/ Feminist Literary criticism..... | 21 |
| - Gender Discrimination..... | 23 |

CHAPTER TWO:

THE RISE OF TALIBAN AND WOMEN’S POSITION IN AFGHANISTAN

| | |
|---|----|
| 1/ Modern Afghan Monarchies and Women’s Shifting position..... | 27 |
| 2/ The Post Modern Monarchy Period and The Status of Women..... | 34 |
| 3/ The Rise of Taliban and The Issue of Women..... | 36 |
| 3-1/ The History of Taliban..... | 36 |
| 3-2/ The Women Status Under The Taliban Regime..... | 38 |
| 4/ <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i> And The Issue of Women..... | 40 |
| 4-1/ The Pre Taliban Era..... | 41 |
| 4-1-1/ Sexual Violence..... | 41 |
| 4-1-2/Pshychological Violence..... | 43 |
| 4-1-2/Physical violence..... | 44 |
| 4-2/ The Status of Women Under Taliban Regime and the Changing Political Condition..... | 46 |

CHAPTER THREE:

WOMEN’S STRUGGLE AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

| | |
|--|----|
| 1/ Laila And Mariam’s Sruggle against Gender discrimination..... | 51 |
| 1-1/ The Influencing Motives..... | 53 |
| 1-1-1/ Women’s Education..... | 53 |
| 1-1-2/ Women’s Raising Awareness..... | 55 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1-1-3/ Women's Empowerment Under the Bond of Sisterhood..... | 57 |
| 2/ Forms of Struggle..... | 60 |
| 2-1/ Women's Solidarity and Self Determination..... | 60 |
| 2-2/ Women From Self- Determination to Self- Defense..... | 63 |
| 2-3/ Education and Gender Discrimination..... | 66 |
| GENERAL CONCLUSION | 70 |
| WORK CITED | 73 |

General Introduction

General Introduction

My intention in writing this research paper is to shed light on one of the Middle Eastern women's issues which is the Status of Afghan women in a novel written by an American born Afghan writer Khaled Hosseini in 2007. My choice falls upon the author and his novel not only because his work has owned a vast popularity and high readership among the world readers, but for my passion for his style of writing and his concern of the women's plight.

From early ages, the Eastern women used to live in a patriarchal society. Their status was meant to be in an inferior position to that of men. They accepted having a subordinate role in their society. For them, being controlled and "submissive" was something ordinary and under both family and the institution of marriage, they thought, it was their destiny and they had to accept it.

Accordingly, what had worsened their inferior position and submissiveness is patriarchy that is transmitted from father to son through culture. Furthermore, a daughter looks to her mother's resistance as an epitome of true motherhood and women are viewed more valuable than they conform to the mother- woman role (Kiddie,2006:36).That is to say, they are supposed to serve their husbands and idealize their children.

As time goes by, in most parts of the Middle East, equality in terms of gender has been achieved. Many women in the Eastern world succeeded to take control of their own destiny and have the power to conduct their lives without constraints. Stretching from household to public life, women have apparently gained their status and increased their contribution in their societies. In household for instance, there are many women who play the role as a wife and a career woman at once; furthermore, there are some women who are the sole breadwinners for their families. In public life, the existence of women is proven by their achievements in many aspects of life, some of them are teachers, doctors, nurses and so forth. Others succeeded to be leaders of organizations and even presidents of a country.

General Introduction

However, despite the achievements of women and their success to defend their existence, numerous issues of gender discrimination still exist and threaten the position of women in all aspects of life. In everyday life, women struggle against oppression exerted over them by the opposite sex. They are abused in and outside their homes. In their own homes, they are treated as an object even by their husbands, fathers or even by their brothers. Many of them are forced to serve their families and banned to pursue a career outside their homes.

Meanwhile, those women who work outside are still experiencing harsh treatment from men who set rules in the workplace. This oppression comes in the forms of sexual harassment and preference of male workers than female. According to Scott and Cheetham, gender discrimination is widespread in the world, for example in India they found that there is a strong preference among genders; Indians prefer to bear sons rather than daughters. They consider the girl as a financial burden for her family. Being a woman in these societies is a real nightmare for them, they are neither alive nor dead, because of domestic violence and rape, 722 women and girls were killed in 2007 in Guatemala (Khan, 2012: 1-2). Another example for violence against women is in Afghanistan. Based on Tompson Reuters Foundation survey, Afghanistan is identified as the most dangerous place for women, about 87% of Afghan women face abuse and violence, they also face high mortality rate due to limitation of seeing doctors and a lack of economic rights (Ibid).

Despite its negative impact, gender biases still exists because men and women have been raised in a patriarchal system which considers and believes that men have the absolute power over women and it has become a common truth that they should accept and obey them. As a result, many girls do accept arranged marriage they do not desire, many wives become submissive and obey their husbands. Even more, many women accept being subjugated and consider that as their fate that they should endure. Besides, men continue to behave like lords in the society, they have the full power to discriminate women especially if the laws of this

General Introduction

country attribute for them to have the full control over women. In other words, since the regime of that country sustains and affords men the right to abuse and control women is patriarchal in its origins.

For many decades ago, gender discrimination was the core interest of the world literature. Many people created literature about women's lives; they give the insights of human being in many areas and cultures by protesting against gender discrimination, so that people can deepen their thoughts about this phenomenon and inspire the discriminated women to challenge it.

A Thousand Splendid Suns written by Khaled Hosseini is one of those literary works written about women's lives in a patriarchal society, which can open people's eyes that until recent decades women face gender discrimination (Sruthi,2012:49).

Khaled Hosseini in his novel, depicts the pitiable conditions of women living in Afghanistan. He beautifully portrayed the characters in the novel. The author brings out the strict laws practiced by Afghan women and the torture they tolerate in their daily life. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is also set against the background of Afghanistan's recent history (Ibid:49)

In the novel, Hosseini crafts the story of two afghan women to deal with the plight of women and reflecting the chaotic last three decades of Afghanistan's history when women undergo harsh treatment and being discriminated by both their husband and the despotic regimes which leads to the establishment of a gender Apartheid system in the country. This latter is based on the complete exclusion of woman from the public life, and restricting their role in household; bearing children and obeying their husbands (Ibid:49). The novel is split into four parts, with a focus on Mariam as an illegitimate child in the first part, continuing with Laila in the second part who is a generation younger than Mariam, and the relationship between the two women in the third part. In the last part, they travel in their separate

General Introduction

destinations (Ibid). The book's title is taken from a poem about Kabul written by the Iranian seventeenth century poet Saib e Tabrizi translated by Josephine Davis (Litchart, 2015:5).

After its publication, Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was widely admired and valued by media and literary critics and many researches are devoted to investigate in it. Washington post while applauding the novel wrote: « In case you are wondering whether *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is good as *The Kite Runner*, Here is the Answer: No. It's better » (qtd in Arshi,2014:1). In another side, The Spectator shows a great admiration for the novel and writes: "Hosseini writes beautifully and is a natural story teller" (Ibid:1).

In her article *Countering Marginality in Khaled Hossein's A Thousand Splendid suns* (2014), Asma Arshi analyzes the characters of both Mariam and Laila from a feminist point of view. She exposes the pathetic and the discriminative life conditions of two Afghan women under a patriarchal society whose attitudes towards women were mainly oppressive. Indeed, through Mariam and Laila, she depicts the severe consequences of an ideology that demands the repression of female desire and total female submissiveness "...Hosseini tries to go deep into Afghanistan and describe the lives of two women in Kabul under the brutal, barbaric, oppressive and subjugating Taliban regime"(Ibid:1).

Antara Choudhury's *From the Margin to the centre: A Study of the Subaltern in Khaled Hossein's A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2013), suggests that Khaled Hosseini delivers a heart breaking portrayal of the plight of the civilians within the Afghan society especially women. According to her, women in Afghanistan are double colonized; that is to say, women suffer unanimously at the hands of patriarchy (Jalil's illtreatment of his former house keeper Nana with whom he has an illicit affair resulted in giving birth to an illegitimate child , Mariam. Her character in the novel foretells a story of her struggle throughout her life; her father's betrayal and her husband Rasheed's illtreatment). Furthermore, she states that the novel

General Introduction

reveals what it can be the fate of lively woman like Laila and her family because of the foreign invasions such as the Soviets “....Tragically left an orphan at fourteen due to the violence wrought by the soviets and the Mujahideen, she met the same fate as Mariam” (Chouhury,2013:212). Being victimized under the laws of the ancient Sharia laws of Taliban, the novel, she states, questions the power of the Afghan women, portrayed in the characters of Mariam and Laila, to endure the harsh life conditions in order to come to the centre (Ibid: 213).

In an article entitled *Feminism versus Gender Equity: Socio- Political Activism in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Namita Singh in her part analyzes the novel through exploring social and political injustice that has been done to the Afghan women. She emphasizes on the gender inequality within the Afghan society. Throughout the novel, women are deprived from their rights as human beings and as female through forceful marriage, lack of freedom and lack of identity. According to her, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the plight of women behind the walls of Afghanistan during several invasions in the country. The status of women and gender equity has been raised through the character of Mariam and Laila. Male domination over the woman in the Afghan society is a major concern that relates the story to the feminist aspect (Singh, 2013:88).

In *Gender Bias Crossways Borders: With Reference to Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Sruthi. P considers that the novel is an example of portrayal of life of women in Afghanistan, the struggle and oppression that the Afghani women endure in their lives are shown in this story. Shedding light on the friendship between Mariam and laila, Hosseini describes the cruelty and problems faced by the Afghan women in their everyday life during the last thirty years of that country's chaotic history of war and oppression in which women are turned to victims (Sruthi,2013:49).

General Introduction

Ab Mjeed Dar, in his paper *A Feminist Perspective in A Thousand Splendid Suns* analyzes and explores social expectations of women in Afghanistan (hope for love, education and peace). According to him, the author tries to captivate his readers through an adherence to demonstrating the reality of gender roles in Afghanistan through Nana, Mariam, Fariba, Laila, Aziza, and other minor female characters, and enables the readers to understand the misery and the disorder that women must face on a daily experience in Afghanistan (Dar,2013: 659).

From my review of literature, I can assume that many critics were interested in Khaled Hossini's novel and many essays and researches were devoted to investigate in it. I deduce that my theme has not been taken under study from my standpoint. Hence, my work will be centered on analyzing the issue of women in Afghanistan and the focus will be put on their status under the regime of Taliban.

So our research question is: to what extend did the changing political scene lead to the discrimination of women in Afghanistan? What is the women's attitude towards this discrimination and how it is reflected in the novel?

The aim of my research is to provide some information about patriarchy and gender discrimination within the Afghan society during the rule of Taliban. I attempt also to throw some light on the women daily lives struggle against discrimination. Therefore, the issue of my research paper will be analyzed from both New historicist and Feminist perspectives that I think fit our objective.

To implement this orientation on my present research, I shall rely on three chapters outline. The first chapter entitled ***A Thousand Splendid Suns in Context***. It is concerned with supplying the historical background of the novel, the writer's biography, synopsis of the novel, the theoretical frame work and finally the literary techniques used in the novel.

General Introduction

The second chapter deals with **The Rise of Taliban and Women's Position in Afghanistan**. My endeavor in this chapter is to directly investigate the status of women throughout the novel by providing first a historical background of the women's status from the modern monarchies era to the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. I shall also discuss the target issue through the themes and the characters as depicted in the novel. The third and the last chapter will be devoted for the **struggle of Afghani women against gender discrimination** system and violence exerted over them under patriarchy.

In the conclusion, I will synthesize all the steps of my research, trying to interrelate between each part's findings to demonstrate the results of my research to set my final personal view about this important issue in Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Chapter One:

***A Thousand Splendid Suns* in Context**

Introduction:

To depict everyday's life, authors take their pens to show the true reflection of the reality of the past and the present. It is reflected through the use of characters, symbols, and deep insights into social issues that characterize each era and society. Thus, in this chapter, I will give an insight to the historical and literary background of the novel, I shall focus on giving a panoramic overview about the novel by including the author's biography, in which I will emphasize on the most conspicuous moments of his life which made of him a famous writer, then I will provide a detailed synopsis of the story. After this, I shall give a space to the socio-historical context of the novel spotlighting the important dates in Afghanistan's history, especially those dealing with the rise of Taliban as a political and religious power and the changing status of women during their reign.

At last, I will introduce the literary approach which I have opted for in my research work and I think it is the most relevant theory that can answer my research problematic. These theories include New Historicism and Feminism; my endeavor is to investigate in Middle Eastern women issues in the novel by extracting the core events which led to the birth of a gender Apatheid system in Afghanistan under a harsh despotic patriarchal society ruled by the Taliban.

1- The author's Life, Time and Influences:

Khaled Husseini, an American born Afghan writer, born on March 4th, 1965 in Kabul to a diplomat in Afghan foreign ministry and a high school teacher. He spent five years of his childhood in the capital city, Kabul. His family lived in a well wheeling Wazir Akbar Khan district of the city in an educated cosmopolitan atmosphere where women lived and worked as equal as men. Khaled grew up loving the classical Persian poetry, his

imagination was excited by the Indian and American movies and he got pleasure from the sport of kite fighting.

In the early 1970s, his father was relocated to Afghanistan's embassy in Tehran where the young Khaled took privilege to deepen his acquaintances of the classical Persian literary tradition that Iran and Afghanistan share.

The Hosseini Family returned to Kabul in 1973, a year that marked the overthrow of the 200 year Afghan Monarchy reined by Mohammed Zahir Shah, the last Afghan monarch who was overthrown by his cousin Daoud Khan and proclaimed himself president of the new republic. Hence, a long era of chaos and instability had began in Afghanistan.

In 1976, Hussein's Father was named as Kabul's ambassador in Paris, Khaled followed his family to France. He spent there a couple of years. During this time, communists get rid of the government of Afghanistan by executing Daoud Khan and his family.

Despite the purging of the civil servant from the old regime, the Hosseini family was still hoping to return home. The country witnessed chaotic disabilities. The Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and attempted to put back their communists' allies, whereas, multiple armed groups make an attempt to push them out. As a result five million Afghans fled their country.

Coming back to Afghanistan was out of question for Hosseini and his Family. They applied for a political asylum in America. In 1980, Khaled and his Family arrived to California at the age of fifteen, speaking almost no English. After years of prosperity, the

Hosseini family lost everything; father and son went to work to ensure their family's incomes.

In America, Khaled entered to school where he struggled with English, in one year, his English became fluent, he started to write short stories in English, in another side his family's situation gradually empowered since his father found a job as a driving monitor.

Living in a country far from his homeland, Hosseini was gritty to make a better life for himself and his family, Khaled studied biology at Santa Clara University and medicine at The University of California. After getting married, he and his wife returned to northern California to live close to their families.

Throughout his medical studies, Khaled has kept on writing short stories in his spare time. Albeit, he is happily settled in America, he found his thought returning to his homeland which he left behind against his will. After the departure of the Soviets in 1989, the radical Taliban group had seized power and controlled the state, imposing a brutal and harsh rule by providing a base of anti-western terrorist and women rights which preceding regimes promoted were completely removed. Hosseini felt compelled to tell the world something of the life he had known before his country was reeling under internal conflicts, war and dictatorship. With some help of his wife and his father in-law, he succeeded to turn one of his short stories into a novel. *The Kite Runner* was his first novel published in 2003; the novel is a semi-autobiography which is set against the backdrop of tumultuous events, from the fall of Afghanistan's monarchy through the Soviet military intervention, the mass departure of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the rise of the Taliban regime. The novel was found an enthusiastic audience around the world. It spent more than two years in the New York best seller list. It has sold more than 12 million copies and translated

into 40 languages. After the success of his first novel, Khaled Hosseini returned to Kabul for the first time in 27 years, he was stunned by the destruction that years of war produced on the city where he was born.

Since his visit to Afghanistan, the writer wants to write about the turmoil his country faced in the last three decades of Afghans' history, focusing this time on women and their experience during the pre-war Afghanistan, the Soviet occupation and the Taliban dictatorship. His second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released on May 22, 2007, a novel eagerly awaited by an army of readers, becoming number one New York Times' bestseller for fifteen weeks following its publication. During its first week on the market, over one million copies were sold.

In 2013, his third novel *And The Mountains Echoed* was published. This time, he avoids focusing on any one of the characters. The book is founded on the relationship between an old ten-year boy and his three year old sister and their father's decision to sell her to a childless couple.

Khaled Hussein has given up his medical practice and devotes himself to writing and working as United Nations agent and named a Goodwill envoy of the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR) and later established the Khaled Hosseini's foundation a nonprofit association which provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan by building shelters for refugees, economic opportunities, education and healthcare for women and children.

2- The synopsis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

The story opens in Gul Daman, a poor and isolated hamlet in Herat, Afghanistan. It tells the story of Mariam, an unwanted child from an illicit affair between a house keeper named Nana and her master a wealthy business man, Jalil.

Mariam a girl of five years lives in a shack (Kolba) with her mother who is rejected by her father after she commits adultery with her master. She was always criticizing Jalil for his hypocrisy. Nana, Mariam's mother dislikes visitors; few people come occasionally to visit her and her daughter like Bibi Jo an older woman who likes gossiping with Nana. But Mariam's favorite visitor is Mullah Faizullah, a local religious leader and Mariam's tutor. He taught her Koran and tried to convince Nana to let her girl go to school and have formal education like other girls of her generation, but she strongly refuses and asserts that there is nothing in school to learn "learn? Learn what, Mullah sahib?....."what is there to learn" (Hosseini,2007: 15) then she turns to her daughter and tell her: "what the sense schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon and you will never learn nothing of value in those schools....."(Ibid: 15). From Nana's lens, there is one thing a woman can learn in such a society "Tahamul", endure, "only one skill and it's this: Tahamul. Endure" (Ibid: 16).

When Mariam attends her fifteen years, she asked her father to take her watch an American Cartoon (Pinokio) in his cinema, Jalil neglects the question. At the noon of her birthday, she dressed and waits for her father who doesn't come. Mariam unwisely heads to his home in Herat. With a great despair and disappointment, Mariam returned to her Kolba, a horrible sight awaits her. Nana, her mother has committed a suicide.

After the funeral of her mother, Mariam was taken to live with her father's legitimate family. She was given the guests' room. After being there for weeks she was told by

Khadija' one of her father's wives that they arranged a marriage for her. Against her will, Mariam is wedded to shoemaker from Kabul, an old man called Rasheed,

In Kabul, the couple dwells in a small house, their life lacks love and affection which can be shared between man and women. Rasheed forces Mariam to wear the burqa, and tells her that she must wear it whenever she leaves the home. Thus, no man can see her face except her husband; "a woman's face is her husband's business" (Hosseini, 2007:40).

When Mariam became pregnant, her husband, Rasheed, tells her that he wants and expects that he will have a son. When she miscarriages, Rasheed's hope for fathering a boy goes astray. Here, his attitude towards Mariam begins to shift.

The story shifted to 1987, following Laila, Fariba and Hakim's daughter. Unlike Mariam, Laila is born to a university teacher in Kabul, she lives a calm and stable life. Laila was born on the eve of the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan. She was always encouraged by her parents to go to school and not get married now because she is still young and she can marry once finishing her studies. She has a boy friend named Tariq who left Kabul to Pakistan with his family. Laila's brothers Ahmad and Noor were killed in a battle when fighting against the Soviet forces. Laila's mother turned ill after this tragedy, she neglects her daughter and refuses either to talk to anyone nor to accept the idea of leaving Kabul to a harmless place far from Kabul.

As the political regime devolves in Afghanistan, Kabul is attacked by the Mujahedeen. This time Laila's mother agrees to flee the country to Pakistan, but, while they were preparing themselves to exit, a bomb hits their house, killing Laila's parents.

Another chapter of the story takes the reader back to Rasheed home, where he and Mariam takes care of Laila, the couple nursed her to health, the girl is pregnant with Tariq's child and agrees to marry Rasheed after he arranged someone to tell her that Tariq was killed.

Few months after, Laila gives birth to a girl she names Aziza, Rasheed was disappointed, but when Zalmai is born, she enjoys his favor for a time again. Rasheed mistreatments extends to Laila. Living under the oppression of furious husband, leads Laila and Mariam to plan how to run away, other than their plan goes astray, they were caught and sent back home. Rasheed locks Laila in her room without food for two days.

By 1998, Afghanistan suffered from a severe drought and violent war also. Laila is restricted as well as life conditions go not as good as they were expected to be, that Aziza was given away to an orphanage because they cannot provide food to her, life becomes a difficult grind for her and Mariam as Rasheed becomes more and more dictatorial and the political situation worsen under the despotic Taliban regime.

Things come to a head when Tariq reappeared in Kabul, Zalmai saw him waiting across the street for Laila. Mariam takes him upstairs while Laila and Tariq were talking downstairs. This visit from Tariq enrages Rasheed when Zalmai tells him, he locks the boy in his room begins beating Laila wrathfully. She tries to fight back but in a little while he has her pinned by the throat. Trying to free Laila, Mariam takes a shovel, stunning Rasheed, then hits him again with all her forces, until she kills him. Mariam pluckily makes an end to years of oppression and misogyny. Laila thinks that they will escape, but Mariam chooses to take responsibility for her act and sacrifice her life for the happiness of Laila and her children.

At the trial, she tells the judge what happens, but he knows that the crime is not to forgive. She must die and ask God's forgiveness.

After Mariam's execution, Laila and Tariq take Zalmia and Aziza to Pakistan where Tariq has been working. They start a new life there.

When the World Trade Center attacks took place, the U.S declared war on Afghanistan, and made an end to the Taliban regime and they were finally removed from power. Laila misses the city of Kabul, she tells Tariq that she wants to go back because it will give Mariam's life a meaning. They go to Heart first where Laila gets a box that Jalil gives to Mullah Faizullah for Mariam. It was a letter of apology and money that would have been her inheritance. Laila and Tariq use this money to help an orphanage in Kabul, Laila is expecting another baby and decides if it will be a girl she would name her Mariam.

3- A Thousand Splendid Suns: Text and Context.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a story based on the lives of two women living in Afghanistan during the last three decades of Afghanistan's history from the late 1960s to the early 2000s. The country is situated in the core of Asia, made up of thirty four provinces and is bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Tajakistan, Turkmanistan and Uzbekistan. The country's capital city is Kabul. Afghanistan means the "Land of Afghans". Afghan is the name of the Pashtuns majority used to describe themselves starting before year 1000. The population of Afghanistan consists of two groups, the Pashtuns, Suni Muslims who are the largest and politically powerful ethnic group, and the Hazaras.

Like any country, Afghanistan has a long and complicated history, but it is until 1973 that Afghanistan gained the world attention due to some radical changes in the politics of

this country. From 1933 to 1973, Afghanistan was a constitutional Monarchy reigned by King Mohammad Zahir Shah. In July, 1973, The King's cousin took advantage of his travel to Italy for medical care, to make a coup and declare himself the head of the country.

Mohammad Daoud Khan became the first president of Afghanistan and its Prime Minister for six years. In April 1978, he was violently overthrown by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and executed with his family.

The PDPA had established many political and social reforms in Afghanistan, including abolishing some religious and traditional customs. These reforms infuriate some groups who believe strongly in adherence to traditional and religious forces. When these groups start to confront the government so rigorously, the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan in 1979, beginning an occupation that would last until 1989.

Throughout the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Afghan Muslim factions put up a resistance sustained by the United States. When the Soviet troops were finally chased from Afghanistan, the country remained under the PDPA for three more years. In 1992, the Soviet Union collapsed; these were bad news for the PDPA whose forces were weakened as a result of the collapse of their strategic allies. In the other side, the Mujahedeen seized power and converted the country to an Islamic State.

In the years following the soviet withdrawal, there was a great deal of infighting among the factions making Afghanistan an unsafe land to live in. As a result, many families and individuals fled the country to live as refugees in other countries like Pakistan. This is obviously highlighted in Khaled Hosseini's novel when Tariq, Laila's lover, left the country with his family for better life conditions, escaping death and daily horrors that Afghanistan witnessed.

In 1996, The Taliban took control of Kabul. After many years of insecurity and violence, the people welcomed the occupation. At first, they celebrated the arrival of Taliban, the Afghan citizens had no idea that things would change and transform their land into a bloodshed battlefield.

The Taliban were a group of Pashtun supremacist unified and took complete control over the country. Despite their pacific initial reception, they quickly make life in Afghanistan excruciating and beyond dangerous. Being fundamentalists and supremacists, they brought the country into a disaster and massacred the Shiite Muslims and Hazaras people. They instituted fundamentalist laws, most of them banning music and dance and those severely restricting women's rights. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the methods in which Taliban used terror and hostility to control the population.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan and overthrown the Taliban. The end of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* occurs in the early 2000s when a provisional government was set under the rule of the president Hamid Karzai. Meanwhile, the American forces remained present in Afghanistan for multiple military reasons. For Afghan citizens, life is still dangerous. In the south, conflicts continue to rage and the Taliban reappeared. In Addition to this, human rights abuses is still being a common reality in Afghanistan. In 2001, Afghanistan was regarded as the most dangerous country in the world especially for women. Nowadays, there are countless refugees living in many parts of the world. Throughout *A Thousand Splendid Suns* the war is a constant companion to the characters.

4- Theoretical Framework

In this research I have opted for both New historicist and feminist approaches. Therefore, it will analyze the novel through its characters and themes. The writer traces the

history of Afghanistan in a very objective manner and builds it up in a very detailed commentary in the political history through dealing with the female plight in Afghan society.

4-1- New historicism:

Since literature is “a vehicle for the representation of history” (Gopinath, 2013: 01), one cannot interpret such a literary text in isolation. It is always related to the broader cultural, political and social surroundings in which the text is written. New historicism is one of the literary approaches which deal with literature and examine its reflection of history.

According to the New World Encyclopedia:

New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text (New world encyclopedia,2015).

From the quotation above, New Historicism can be defined as a literary approach based on the parallel reading of literary text, generally from the same historical period. New Historicist attempt primarily to the historical and political surroundings in which the text is produced as well as the meaning, critical interpretation and evaluation of the text (Bressler, 1994:216).

I shall try throughout my thesis to employ such concept put by the New Historicist theorists to depict the “ historicity of the text” by analyzing the specific cultural , social and historical elements which shape the novel, based specifically on the issue of Afghan women.

4-2-Feminism

Definition of Feminism

Feminism is a women's movement which emerged as response to gender discrimination occurring in a patriarchal society. To fight against the tyranny of patriarchal control, many women voice their thoughts and speak their languages of freedom for every oppressed woman. As it is defined by Bhasin and Khan feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labor, fertility and sexuality in the family at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation (Bhasin, Khan, 1999:3)

Meanwhile, Bell Hooks explains that "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression". It means that feminism does not consider men the enemy of women because the ones who maintain gender discrimination are not only men, but also women. Women who do not seek for equality are also the ones who perpetuate gender discrimination. She asserts that: "by naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult". (Hooks, 2000: 1)

Beyond many various definitions of feminism, what can be concluded is that since feminism deals with gender discrimination, its goal is to end it and gain equality between men and women. To end the discrimination and change the situation which is unfavorable to women, people should understand that factors constructing and perpetuating gender inequality are not only men, but also women. This is in line with what Hooks says that "we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism

until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action”.(qtd in Nurul,2012:1)

4-2- Feminism in literature

Literature is a creative form of writing which reflects and mirrors human experience (Abrams, 2000: 51). A work of literature is a response to the problems of human existence and fate including discrimination against women. For centuries, feminists continue to voice their perspectives about equality of women and men through literary works. Within their works, either fiction or nonfiction, feminists explore the histories and stories of women’s lives and experiences.

Pam Morris states that literature gives people a powerful insight about the disadvantages that women get from society. The imaginative ways of literary works in portraying women’s lives can increase people’s indignation at the problem of gender and it will help to stop it. In addition, positive images of women which are crafted by feminist writers can be used to raise women’s self-esteem. In other words, literature can open the world’s eyes about unequal treatment women experience and inspire women to fight for their rights. (Nurul, 2012: 26).

Due to the fact that literature can portray the problems of humankind and at the same time can inspire people, feminists use it as a medium to spread feminist movement and its ideals. Therefore, a theory which is widely known as feminist literary criticism emerges with the focus on the analysis towards women in literature.

4-3- Feminist Literary Criticism

According to Cuddon, feminist literary criticism is an attempt to evaluate women’s lives and experiences which are portrayed in any kind of literature, such as

novel, drama and poetry. It questions male domination within literature, criticizes men's representations and male authors, and privileges female writers. Furthermore, it also challenges women's images that have been created by male writers.

In the history of literature, men have brought literature into their own world. Male authors constructed the images of women on the basis of their perceptions; women were weak and were destined to obey and serve men. Thus, literature once was dominated by male authors, they created literary works and they automatically become the readers. According to Bressler, in the 1960s and 1970s male dominance and prejudice in literary works could be seen clearly as follows:

- Literary works mostly contained the stereotypes of women such as women were goddesses of beauty and mindless entities.
 - Male authors such as Dickens, Wordsworth, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Twain and other writers were considered as holy creatures.
 - Women played minor roles or were put in the secondary positions in the literary works.
 - Female scholars such as Simon de Beauvoir and Virginia Wolf did not gain recognition.
- (Bressler, 1994:182)

Women as the minority did not have a chance to create literary works as many as men. In progress, then feminist literary criticism arose at the end of 1960s (Morris, 37) and its presence brought a new nuance that women could also embrace hope and perception into literature.

Feminist literary criticism aims to reveal male domination in literature and also to raise women's awareness in literary works, either as writers, characters or readers (Carter, 2006:91). In addition, Bressler states that "*feminist literary criticism wants to show*

humankind the errors of such a way of thinking” (Bressler, 189). Just like men, women have also their own rights; they are not inferior to men. In spite of how often literature portrays and society stereotypes women as bitches, angels, housewives, old maids, or brainless, women must struggle against such discrimination and define who they are. He also clarifies that women can no longer allow their patriarchal society to determine their opinions, roles, and values.

- Gender Discrimination:

Gender discrimination is a term used to describe an unequal treatment which is based on gender. Many people misunderstand the concept of gender and they often relate it to sex. Gender and sex, though often seen related, are actually not synonymous or substitutes for each other. According to Lorber, sex is the state of being females and males; meanwhile, gender refers to women and men. Each gender has its own identity and roles which are called as femininity and masculinity (Nurul,2012: 33)

Simone de Beauvoir differentiates sex and gender and notices that there is a relation between natural and social functions. According to her, being female and being a woman are two very different kinds of being because the term female refers to the natural facts, while the term woman refers to something that has been constructed by the society. She clarifies that: “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. This means that gender is a result of social construction.

This recognition of gender is also proposed by other scholar such as Virginia Woolf, who states that gender identity is constructed by the society and it can be fought and changed.

Another scholar, Butler, also clarifies the difference between sex and gender. According to her, sex is a natural given, while gender is an the result of cultural and social construction. She develops her famous performative theory of gender which claims “*gender as what one does, not what one is*”. Gender identity is not a form of intrinsic essence but it is a result of actions and behaviors, that is, performance. In other words, Butler argues that everyday actions, gestures, speech utterances, representations, dress codes and behaviors produce what is perceived as men or women or gender in general.

As the result of social construction, gender difference is the core of the cause of gender discrimination. The characteristics and behaviors that are attributed to men and women by the society have created the separate spheres between them. Women are valued as weak creatures. Meanwhile, power and authority remain in the hands of men and this is what causes discrimination against women. As it is stated by Morris that “gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer from systematic social injustice” (qtd in Nurul,2012: 35).

Chapter Two:

The Rise of Taliban and Women's Status in Afghanistan

Introduction:

Afghanistan may be the only country in the world where, since 1880, Kings and politicians have made huge endeavors for the empowerment of women's status. However, these efforts had been strongly campaigned by the rural afghan rules which constitute the roots of tribal powers that have frequently ruined the centre based modernization efforts. Thus, women found themselves placed at the centre of a conflict between Western concepts of modernization and tribal codes of traditionalism.

In this chapter, I will try to provide a brief background of the status of women in Afghanistan. Hence, I shall attempt to chronicle Afghanistan's political history in order to highlight the sporadic efforts made to empower the status of women in Afghanistan, starting from the modern monarchies era to the post monarchy period. Then I aim to throw some light on the second era of change in Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban regime. An era when the rights of women were violated and their status declined.

The disorder and conflicts in Afghanistan have often been caused by interference of western countries and countries bordering Afghanistan and that have contributed to the fragmentation of the Afghan nation and polity. In many cases, tribal politics is still determined by the states that search their own profits.

Although there have been infrequent attempts to bring dissenting and opposing tribes together, the Afghan have at no points experienced a strong centralized state with a common legal system (Ghosh,2003:4). Instead, rival ethnic groups have had political ambitions to capture Kabul and, through well armed tribal leaders (supported by external funds), created their own sovereignties. Ethnically based rivalries, combined with open and varied interpretations of Islam, have created fractious culture. Eventually, the foreign interferences have often been the cause of war and civil war lasted for years and decades (Ghosh, 2003:4).

The effects of the mentioned domestic disorders and conflicts on women have been ruthless since women's lives, on the one hand, have been used as tools to establish tribal kinship among ethnic groups. On the other hand, women's liberty and freedom has been a thin-skinned issue for the tribal leaders. From their standpoint, the women's freedom of thought and liberty may lead to the weakness of men of the society and sooner or later they will lose their control over their women. According to the tribal rules, men should have an absolute control on their wives and the women of the family. Tribal law views marriage as an alliance between groups. Thus, women are pawned in into marriages and are forced to accept it. The right of going to school and being educated is far from being a part of the Afghan girls' daily lives; they were deprived from this right (Ibid: 87).

Women are supposed to be as holders of men's honor or *Namus*, thus, they stay inside the domestic sphere and are supposed to be silent and voiceless (Kiddie,2006: 39). The family, the tribe, and ultimately the nation are invested in women. Moghadam in this context points out that:

the issue of women's rights in Afghanistan has been historically constrained by (a) the patriarchal nature of gender and social relations deeply embedded in traditional communities (b) the existence of weak central state, that has been unable to implement modernizing programs and goals in the face of tribal feudalism (qtd in Ghosh,2003: 05).

1- Modern Afghan Monarchies and women's Shifting Position:

During the time of Abdul Rahman Khan who ruled from 1880 to 1901, modern Afghanistan was born. He is a descendent of the pashtun ethnic group who largely ruled and controlled Afghanistan. Amir Abdul Rahman was the first ruler to attempt consolidation of the nation into a centralized state. He ruled with brutality that led him to be named "the Iron Amir" (Ibid: 85).

During his reign, Amir Abdul Rahman tried to alter some of the traditional laws that were disadvantageous to women's status. For instance, he put an end to the custom forcing a woman to marry her dead husband's next of kin, raised the age of marriage, and gave women rights to divorce under specific circumstances. Even though Abdul Rahman considered women obedient to men, he still felt that they were 'due just treatment' (Ghosh, 2003:84). It can be inferred that his liberal wife, BOBO Jan may have influenced him, in this concern Ghosh declares:

In fact, she was the first Afghan queen to appear in public in European dress without a veil. She rode horses and trained her maidservants in military exercises. She had a keen interest in politics and went on numerous delicate missions to discuss politics between contending parties (qtd in Ghosh, 2003: 84)

After the death of Abdulrahman, his son Amir Habibullah Khan took over and reigned for ten years. Habibullah continued his father's progressive agenda by putting a limit to the extravagant marriage expenses that often caused poverty in many families. His wives were seen publically unveiled and in western clothes.

The most contribution of Habibullah to the Afghan government was the return of Afghans who were in exile; specifically Mahmud Beg Tarzi who played a significant role in the modernization of Afghanistan;

If there is a single person responsible for the modernization of Afghanistan in the first two decades of the twenty first century it was Mahmud Beg Tarzi. He returned from Syria to establish and edit a modernist nationalist newspaper, "The Siraj ul Akhbar I Afghan" "the lamp of the news of Afghanistan" (Ghosh, 2003: 61).

Between 1911 and 1918, Mahmud Beg Tarzi advocated modern education and political views critical of western imperialism as well as, in subtle ways, the monarchy. Educated in

Syria and Turkey, Tarzi was strongly influenced by modern interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence, Fiqh and by the liberties afforded to women in these countries.

Convinced of women's abilities to engage in public professions, Tarzi viewed women as people who deserved full citizenship; he claimed that educated women were an asset to the future generations and concluded that Islam did not deny them equal rights. In his newspaper, *Siraj-ul- Akhbar*, Tarzi devoted a special section on women's issues entitled "*Celebrating Women of The World*" (1911) which was edited by his wife Asma Tarzi. "no one before Tarzi had pronounced such words as "Liberty", "respect for the homeland and religion", "union", "progress", or "school" (ibid, 86).

As a result of Tarzi's liberal influence, Habibullah opened a school with English curriculum for girls, which was considered against the traditional values by tribal leaders and mullahs. Unfortunately, the liberalization of the nation through education and modernization generated an opposition movement. Education for women and state's interference in marriage institution challenged the power of tribal leaders and their patrilineal¹ and patrilocal² kinship systems, resulting in Habibullah's assassination in 1919. After the assassination of Habibullah Khan, his son, Amanullah was on the throne working for the modernization period of Afghanistan.

¹ - Patrilineality, also known as the male line, it is a common kinship system in which an individual's family membership derives from and is traced through his or her father's lineage. It generally involves the inheritance of property, rights, names, or titles by persons related through male kin.

A patriline ("father line") is a person's father, and additional ancestors, as traced only through males

² -The definition of patrilocal is a society or custom in which a married couple settles with or near the husband's family.

An example of a society that would be described as patrilocal is a society where a woman gets married and moves next door to her husband's parents.

<http://www.yourdictionary.com>

What Amanullah did as the first task was to completely liberate Afghanistan from the British. He succeeded by defeating the British in the third and final Anglo-Afghan war in 1919. Amanullah was harsh in his attempts to modernize Afghanistan. His modernizing agenda included the liberation of women from tribal norms.

His enthusiasm and persistence in enforcing these changes were heavily influenced by the modernization agenda operating in Turkey and his impressions from his travels in Europe (Wahab, Youngerman, 2007:103). In 1923, Amanullah made the first constitution, establishing the basis for the formal structure of the government and setting up the role of the monarch within the constitution frame work (ibid: 106).

Amanullah was also influenced by Mahmud Tarzi in his endeavors. Tarzi was specifically involved in designing and implementing changes pertaining to women through his personal example of monogamy, education and employment of female family members and their unveiled public appearance. His daughter Soraya later married Amanullah. Another daughter of Tazi married Amanullah's brother. Therefore, it is not surprising that Tarzi's sophisticated and liberal intellectual ideology blossomed and concretely embedded itself in Amanullah's reign.

Amanullah publicly campaigned against the veil, polygamy, and encouraged education of girls not just in Kabul but also in the countryside. At a public function, Amanullah said that Islam does not require women to cover their bodies or wear any special kind of veil. At the conclusion of the speech, queen Soraya tore off her veil in public and the wives of other officials present at the meeting followed this example. Many women from Amanullah's family publicly participated in organizations and went on to become government officials. Later in life, an example is Amanullah's sister, formed the "Anjuman I Himayat- I Niswan" (Women's Protection Organization) in early 1920. This organization encouraged women to

bring their complaints and injustice to the organization and to unite and contest the oppressive institutions. Along with her mother, Soraya also founded the first magazine for women called “Ershad- I- Niswan” (Guidance for Women). Another sister of Amanullah founded a hospital for women, and they are encouraged to get an education and in that attempt fifteen young girls were sent to Turkey for higher education in 1928. Queen Soraya was very influential in enforcing change for women and publicly encouraged them to be active participant in nation building (Wahab, Youngerman, 2007: 207).

In 1926 at the 7th anniversary of Independence, Queen Soraya in a public speech delivered:

It “Independence” belongs to all of us and that is why we celebrate it. Do you think, however, that our nation from the outset needs only men to serve it? Women should also take their part as women did in the early years of our nation and Islam. From their example we must learn that we must all contribute toward the development of our nation and that this cannot be done without being equipped with knowledge. So we should all attempt to acquire as much knowledge as possible in order that we may render our services to society in the manner of women of early Islam (Dupree, 1999: 46).

Between 1927-1928 Amanullah and his wife Soraya visited Europe. On this trip, they were honored and feted. In fact, in 1928 the King and the Queen received honorary degrees from Oxford University; they were very impressed by Europe and also by the change in Turkey. On their return to Afghanistan, they tried to implement some of the social and cultural changes they had experienced abroad. This was an era when Muslim nations like Turkey and Egypt were also on the path of modernization. Hence, in Afghanistan, the elite were impressed by such changes and imitate their developmental models. However, the time was not right.

Seemingly, the British circulated the picture of Queen Soraya without a veil, dining with foreign men, and having her hand kissed by the Leader of France among the tribal regions of Afghanistan. Conservatives Mullahs and regional leaders considered her act as a betrayal of Afghan culture, religion and “honor” of women. One can take the circulation of such images

from foreign sources as evidence of British efforts to destabilize the Afghan monarchy, the first on many international attempts to keep the country in political, social and economic turmoil (Wahab, Youngerman, 2007: 108).

When the royal family returned, they were met with hostility and eventually forced out of office. Amanullah tried to unite Islam and state policies, but faded when he tried to impose rapid changes relating to women's status. Many conservative Afghans in the rural areas felt that the reforms were too "western" for their society and the forced changes were against the doctrine of Islam. People in the countryside were unable to comprehend the changes being imposed on them at haste, especially since men saw these changes as challenging their familial and tribal authority. Resistance was strongest to the elimination of bride price and polygamy and to the introduction of education for girls. The 1920s was thus the time that conflicts between the elite modernists and traditionalist tribes began to confront. The main bone of disagreement was the changing status of women. What rose up traditionalists and rural population was the institution in 1924 of the freedom of women to choose their own partner and attempts to abolish the bride price. Fathers of young women saw such progressive laws as a loss of social status, familial control and financial security.

By 1928, the ethnic tribal leaders in rural regions grew restless and developed coalitions to protest the freedoms women were experienced in Kabul. It should be pointed out here that in this period women in tribal rural areas outside Kabul did not receive the benefits of modernization. Tribal leaders controlled not only their regions, but through inter-tribal unity, they detained control over most of the nation in resisting attempts at modernization. The Loya jirga¹ finally put their foot down when marriage age of girls was raised to 18 years and for

¹ - The term takes its origins from the Pashtu Loya Jirga literally means The Great Assembly (Government, Politics and Diplomacy) an assembly of regional leaders and tribal chiefs in Afghanistan.

men to 21 years, and polygamy was abolished. They also opposed the education of girls, and by the late 1920s they forced Amanullah to reverse some of his policies and conform to a more traditional agenda of social change. Schools for girls in Kabul and in rural areas were closed down, and women had to wear their veil again. As Moghadam points out, women could not cut their hair, Mullahs were to be re-established. Amanullah even married a second time (for a brief period) to pacify the opposition, but it was too late. According to Gregorian, "Amanullah determined to improve this situation, the status of women, and maintaining that his support of the feminist cause was based on the true doctrine of Islam, took more steps in this direction in his short rule than were taken by all his predecessors together" (qtd in Ghosh, 2003: 6). Amanullah was ahead of his time; his liberalism in an era when Afghanistan was barely united in a sense of nationhood was traumatic for the state. The next two decades saw the Afghan royalty change hands with different families and leaders, but not again a leader who would push the reform and women's agenda to the loss of their rule.

Following the exile of Amanullah, a series of rulers introduced conflicting laws regarding the status of women. From termination of gender equality laws under Amir Habibullah II, a Tajik, who ruled for a period of nine months after Amanullah, to Nadir Shah who exiled him, women saw in the 1930s 1940s a vigilant introduction of rights. In 1931, Nadir Shah announced the second constitution. He opened some schools for girls and tried to bring about some gender based reforms but was careful to avoid conflicts with the Mullahs and tribal leaders. Despite his cautionary approach to women's rights, Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1933, and Zahir Shah¹ came to power (Wahab, Youngerman, 2007: 112).

¹ - The term Shah is a title given to the kings, emperors and the lords of Iran, Persia. It was also adopted by the kings of Shirvan (a historical Iranian region in Transcaucasia) namely the Shirvanshahs, the rulers and offspring of the Ottoman Empire (termed there as Şeh), as well as in Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

1-2 The Post Monarchy Period and the Status of Women:

By the mid 20th century, with massive foreign aid and technical assistance from Soviet Union, Afghanistan started a modernizing journey. By the late 1950s, a need was perceived for women to be economically active to help Afghanistan achieve its targeted developmental goals in which Women's issues were once given some consideration. The King's cousin and Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud Khan did not want to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor Amanullah and declared the veiling as a voluntary option (Ibid: 122). By now, women were expected once again to abandon the veil, marriage expenses were reduced, and women were encouraged to contribute to the economy.

The 1940s and 1950s saw women becoming nurses, doctors and teachers. In 1964, the third constitution allowed women to enter elected politics and gave them the right to vote. The first women Minister was in the health department, elected to the parliament along with three other women. In 1965, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a Soviet-backed socialist organization was formed. The same year also saw the formation of the first women's group, The Democratic Organization, of Afghan Women (DOAW). The main objectives of these women's were to eliminate illiteracy among women, ban forced marriages, and change the bride price for good of the people who had weak economy.

In late 1970s, the second era of intense reform happened in the lives of Afghan women. There was a rise in the women's education, and there were women professors in the universities and representatives in the parliament (Dupree, 1999:86). The year of 1978 saw the rising of the PDPA to power. It is during the PDAPA rule that rapid social economic change and some of the 1920s themes were implemented and mass literacy for women was introduced (Moghadam, 2003:432). Massive land reform programs along with abolition of the pride price and raising the age of marriage were also part of the PDPA agenda. On October

1978 a decree was issued with the explicit intention of ensuring equal rights for women. Minimum age of marriage was set at sixteen for girls and eighteen for boys. The obligation of women into education was perceived by some as “unbearable interference in domestic life” (Ghosh, 2003:102). Once again, revolutionary speed of social change caused concern among the Mullahs and tribal chiefs in the interiors. For them compulsory education, especially for women, is going against the grain of tradition, anti- religious and a challenge to male authority. As a result, there have been an increase of incidents; shooting of women in western clothes, killing of PDPA reformers in rural areas and general harassment of women social workers increased. The quotation below sustains our idea:

The PDPA's use of force in bringing the change to fulfillment, combined with a brutal disregard for societal religious sensitivities, resulted in massive reaction from the rural population (qtd in Moghadam, 2003:432).

During the unstable (democratic) Soviet- supported regime women's issues became central and the implementation of reforms was enforced, to some extents. During this era, women were employed in significant numbers in universities, private corporations, the airlines and as doctors and nurses. But for the nation as a whole, it was a period of anarchy and destruction. Beginning with the soviet occupation of the country on December 1979, Afghanistan witnessed a decade of a long war. Sustained by external forces, funding, United States, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and China, the Mijahedeen fought against the Soviets. The Afghan countryside was the breeding grounds of the “freedom fighters”. Doubtful, of the Soviet socialist agenda to defeat the traditional culture and religion of Afghanistan, The Mujahedeen were able to gather forces to form their own revolutionary army fighting in the name of Islam. The “Freedom fighters” emphasized the failure of all socialist policies including those that guaranteed women liberties through education and employment (Hanne, 2003:142).

In 1989, when the Soviet left Afghanistan, the country was in disorder and became the site for civil war with the government transfer of power in 1992. That year, the Mujahedeen took over Kabul and declared Afghanistan an Islamic state.

From this date, the human rights, including those of women started to witness a decline and infringement which affected their status, and paved the way to the establishment of complete gender seclusion system. “In 1992, women were increasingly precluded from public service. In conservative areas in 1994, many women appear in public only if dressed in a complete head-to-toe garment with mesh covered opening for their eyes” (Telesetsky, 2013: 293) The period from 1992-1996 saw unmatched barbarism by the Mujahedeen, where stories of killings, rapes, amputations and other forms of violence were told daily. To avoid rape and forced marriage, young girls chose putting end to their lives then going on marriage they do not want. This was the start of a long period of discrimination against Afghani women and gender Apartheid system which lasted until the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001.

2- The rise of Taliban and the Issue of women:

Before digging deeper in the issue of women under the Taliban regime, I think that it is necessary to provide some vital information about the Taliban system, including a brief history about the emergence of this group as well as the conditions of women under the gender apartheid of Taliban.

2-1- The history of Taliban:

“The Taliban is a Pashto and Persian word of Arabic origins referring to lower level students of Islam, usually from poor, rural background and always males” (Wahab, Youngerman,2007: 205). Those students originated from Jamiat Ulema- Islam and constituted the core of the Taliban movement that ruled Afghanistan in the second half of the twentieth

century. The majority of the Taliban members were students from the Pashtun areas of Pakistan, including thousand of Afghan refugees from the Soviet conflict for whom the religious school provided religious education while free schools supplied food and lodging. Additionally, a great number of Pashtun Pakistani young students also joined the movement, as well as Arabs and other non- Afghan Muslim volunteers (Ibid: 205).

The Taliban, led by Mullah Mohammad Omar, were trained, armed and supported heavily by the (PSI) Pakistani Intelligence Service which has close links with various factions of Afghanistan Mujahedeen that rose up in resistance to the Soviet occupation. One can bear in mind that there is nucleus dissimilarity between the Taliban and the Mujahedeen groups, that is, while the latter were well- educated intellectual Muslims, Taliban Mullahs were mostly ignorant of Islamic history, law and scholarship. The curriculum of the Madrassas (school) was based on the repetition of the Quran and repeated the simple puritan values of the primitive Islam. The Mullahs who ran the schools often confuse Pashtun custom with Islamic laws, especially in matters of gender role (Ibid, 205).

Taliban emerged as a powerful movement in late 1994 when Pakistan chose the Taliban to guard a line trying to open a trade route from Pakistan to Central Asia. With Pakistan providing weapons, military training, and financial support, the Taliban gained control over several Afghan cities and successfully captured Kabul in September 1996. The Taliban continued to control most of Afghan territories with discontinuous fighting with Afghanistan's Northern Alliance, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud, the former Minister of Defense under the coalition government led by President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Following a public condemnation of the Saudi monarchy for allowing U.S. troops to enter and operate in Saudi Arabia, Osama Bin Laden moved to Sudan and eventually, in 1996, to Afghanistan, where he had fought against the Soviet troops and where he was warmly

welcomed by the Taliban and its top leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar. In 1997, the Taliban altered the name of the country to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan with Mullah Omar, who had previously assumed the religious title of “Amir of the faithful”, he shifted the regime of the country into an “Islamic” one, and announced that “the new Taliban government would be neither parliamentary nor presidential, but Islamic” (qtd in Das, 2010: 23). Consequently, there remain no trace of constitution, rule of law or independent judiciary in Afghanistan; many municipal and provincial authorities use the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law and traditional tribal codes of justice.

As the Afghan Taliban had allowed Bin Laden to recruit militants and run training camps, the United Nations Security Council asked the Taliban to cease its support for terrorism and hand over Bin Laden. The Taliban took no action to end Bin Laden's training activities and recruitment of militants and show no positive response to the Security Council resolutions. After the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the United States asked the Taliban to turn over Bin Laden. The Taliban refused to hand over Bin Laden and ignored the U.S. demands, and the United States, in response, with the coalition of Pakistan to capture Ben Laden and fight the militant groups and the Taliban members who sustained Al-Quaida, they bombed Taliban's strategic military sites in Afghanistan. Consequently, the Taliban lost control over the Afghan Capital, Kabul, and was completely routed on December 9, 2001 (Wahab, Youngerman, 2007: 221).

2-2- The women's Status under the Taliban regime:

When the Taliban seized power in 1996, they put their own twist on the Quran and restored their own Islamic balance that was from their lens upset by the western culture invasion (Telesetsky, 2013: 296). The instauration of the new law centered on the complete gender

separation and women were the most targeted by these rules. They lost whatever rights they still retained. A day after Taliban's entering to Kabul, the Shari'a radio announced that Mullah Omar passed a decree in which he set up a complete gender apartheid system.

Women are not permitted to leave their homes, women students are overthrown out of schools, female government workers lost their jobs and women are permitted to leave their homes if only accompanied by a male relative. Those who have lost their close male relative cannot leave their home even if they need medical care. Furthermore, shopkeepers were forbidden to sell to women customers otherwise they will be relentlessly punished (Wahab, youngerman, 2007: 236). In public sphere, they must be covered from head to toe in a Chadari, with only a mesh opening through which they could see and breathe; they are not permitted to wear colorful clothes or white socks since the white is the color of Taliban's flag. Houses and buildings in public view must have their windows painted over if females are present, the Taliban severely limited women's access to health care and closed public bathhouses for women which served a female meeting places for social and celebrating purposes, in addition to essential hygiene facilities for households without water. It is important to notice here that all these severe and discriminative codes are enforced in a haphazard manner, and varied from region to another, with more severe restrictions imposed in Pashtun areas (Teletsky, 2013: 24-25).

All in all, since the Taliban take over, there has been a little improvement in the status of women. In Taliban's areas, discrimination against women remains an official policy and pervades nearly every aspect of women's lives. In short order, women became the chief target of the religious police, they were publically humiliated and whipped for not complying with dress codes or other Taliban's regulations.

3- *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the issue of women:

I went to Afghanistan in the spring of 2003, and I met with people who worked for nongovernmental organizations, people who worked as policemen, women who were working as teachers, and I basically just listened to their stories. The purpose of the visit was to educate myself. I really wasn't thinking at all about researching a book. But I came home with this amazing repertoire of eyewitness accounts and stories that were vivid and heartbreaking, and that sat in my head for about another year. When I began writing this novel, all those voices came back and I think the two main female characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were kind of inspired by my collective sense of what women in Afghanistan went through, particularly since the withdrawal of the Soviets and the breakout of anarchy and extremism and criminality (Interviewed by Kon,2008: 08).

Inspired by the women's horrific stories and based on historical evidence, Khaled Hosseini released his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in 2007. In his story, the writer provides a vivid portrait of a country shattered by a series of ideological leaders and wars imposed on by foreign and internal forces through a story of two Afghan women. Centered on the friendship between Mariam and Laila, the novel describes the cruelty and problems encountered by Afghani women in their daily lives when women suffer from gender discrimination rule, under both patriarchy and the despotic regime of Taliban.

Through the analysis of themes and characters, this part of my research will be devoted to the depiction of the way Afghani women are oppressed under both patriarchy and the Taliban's regime, then their struggle to put an end to their suffering and agony.

Before tackling directly the situation of women under Taliban, I suppose giving an insight on the women's lives before the rise of Taliban as a gender discriminative regime as it is depicted in the novel.

3-1 The Pre- Taliban Era:

Gender discrimination has been the longest war women have been fighting for centuries. Throughout history, women across the world have been the victims of gender discrimination. *A thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the plight of women behind the walls of Afghanistan during several invasions in the country, patriarchal based society and the changing policies. Consequently, Afghani women have strongly suffered during this hectic period (Stuhr, 2011:53)

The most apparent figure of gender discrimination in the Afghan society before the reign of Taliban was violence since it shows real acts of discrimination, such as rapping, kicking, slapping, and it leaves negative impacts on the victims either physical, psychological or sexual harm (Annisa, 2004: 11) And all of that are found in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

3-1-1-Sexual Violence:

Sexual violence includes all actions performed by resorting to force without the consent of the person such as rape, sexual harrasment, marital rape and incest (Ibid: 11). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the female characters experience rape and marital rape. In the first chapter, the first female character named Nana is raped by her employer, Jalil. It is told that “Nana had been one of the housekeepers. Until her belly began to swell” (Hosseini, 2007: 6). Although it is not written explicitly, but the quotation means that Nana is rapped until she gets pregnant. On the one hand, as a woman whose job is a housekeeper and due to her health condition, Nana becomes more vulnerable to rape. In the other hand, Jalil's positions as a man, where in a patriarchal society has more power than women, and as Nana's employer cause him to rape her. The rape Jalil does to Nana leaves scars in her life. She has to bear disgrace in her whole

life after she gets pregnant and gives birth to a *harami* or bastard girl named Mariam, who is later on abandoned by Jalil.

Meanwhile, other female characters in the novel, Mariam and Laila, experience marital rape or a rape of a wife by her husband. Rasheed, their husband, always forces his sexual desire on Mariam and Laila no matter their conditions are. He forces them to serve him even when they are tired or sick. For Mariam and Laila, sexual contact is sickening. Mariam considers sex in her marriage as laborious sessions that when Rasheed marries Laila and never touches her again, she feels grateful.

But it was inevitable that they would run into each other. Madam passed the girl on the stairs, in the narrow hallway, in the kitchen, or by the door as she was coming in from the yard. When they met like this, an awkward tension rushed into the space between them. The girl gathered her skirt and breathed out a word or two of apology, and, as she hurried past, Madam would chance a sidelong glance and catch a blush. Sometimes she could smell Rasheed on her. She could smell his sweat on the girl's skin, his tobacco, his appetite. Sex, mercifully, was a closed chapter in her own life. It had been for some time, and now even the thought of those laborious sessions of lying beneath Rasheed made Madam queasy in the gut (Hosseini, 2007: 215).

From the quotation, we may understand that Mariam is thankful for not having sex anymore with Rasheed. Sex is a laborious session that tires her so much. The thought of having sex with Rasheed even disgusts Mariam. Since Rasheed never asks Mariam for her consent before they have sex, it can be told that their sexual contact is a marital rape that sickens, tires, and disgusts Mariam. Just like Mariam, Laila experiences the same way about her sexual life. Rasheed always forces himself upon her so that for Laila, sexual contact is merely a duty done of necessity. After Laila gives birth to her first child, Aziza, the doctor forbids her to have sex in six weeks. However, before the time, Rasheed forces her to serve his sexual desire. Ironically, he blames Mariam for Laila's denying and whips her using his

belt. Seeing Mariam is being tortured, Laila has no choice but doing what Rasheed wants. "It's your doing. I know it is," he scrambled, advancing on her. Mariam slid out of her bed and began backpedaling. Her arms instinctively crossed over her chest, where he often struck her first. "What are you talking about?" she stammered. "Her denying me. You're teaching her to." "I should have known that you'd corrupt her," Rasheed quarrel at Mariam. He swung the belt, testing it against his own thigh. The buckle jingled loudly. "Stop it, bas!" the girl said. "Rasheed, you can't do this." "Go back to the room." Mariam backpedaled again. "No! Don't do this!" Now! Rasheed raised the belt again and this time came at Mariam. Then an astonishing thing happened: The girl lunged at him. She grabbed his arm with both hands and tried to drag him down, but she could do no more than dangle from it. She did succeed in slowing Rasheed's progress toward Mariam.

"Let go!" Rasheed cried.

"You win. You win.

Don't do this. Please, Rasheed, no beating! Please don't do this." (Hosseini, 2007: 234-235).

From the dialogue above, it can be seen that Rasheed blames and accuses Mariam that she provokes Laila not to have sex with him. In order to defend Mariam from Rasheeds anger, Laila eventually does what Rasheed wants. Since Laila is forced to serve his sexual desire without her consent, their sexual intercourse is a marital rape that is hided and justified in marital bound. Sexual life always is one-sided with Rasheed as the one who controls it, abandoning Laila's and Mariam's consent.

3-1-2 Psychological Violence

Psychological violence against women is more insidious than other forms of violence especially since women are affected in their dignity. It includes menacing, threatening,

isolating from friends and family and any action that results in psychological distress (Annisa, 2004: 11). Throughout Laila's and Mariam's marriage, their husband, Rasheed, often insults, mocks at them, and threaten them. Hosseini, depicts that it is not easy for Mariam to bear Rasheed's ridiculous insults and his way of treating her.

It wasn't easy tolerating him talking this way to her, to bear his scorn, his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat. But after four years of marriage, Mariam saw clearly how much a woman could tolerate when she was afraid. And Mariam was afraid. She lived in fear of his shifting moods, his volatile temperament, his insistence on steering even mundane exchanges down a confrontational path that, on occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks, and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not (Hosseini, 2007: 97-98).

Mariam is nothing but a house cat to Rasheed. Rasheed's psychological violence towards Mariam has brought anxiety and fear to her. His shifting moods and unstable temperament always frightens Mariam. Rasheed's second wife, Laila, also becomes the object of his insults, mocks, and threats. He often expresses his anger on Laila. He finds fault with her, the way she smelled, the way she dressed, the way she combed her hair, her yellowing teeth, and many other things. Moreover, after getting fired from his job, Rasheed becomes ill tempered. He dared even to ask his daughter, Aziza, to be a street vagabond. When Laila confronts him, he threatens her with a gun. His threat is a form of psychological violence that results in fear and anxiety for Laila. Even though psychological violence is dangerous, it has great negative effects on the victims' lives (Nurul, 2012:72)

3-1-2- Physical Violence

In addition to psychological violence, physical violence is presented even in the novel. It includes slaps, kicks, and other actions that may cause physical harm (Annisa, 2004:11). In the novel, Mariam and Laila often experience physical violence conducted by their husband, Rasheed. He infringes Mariam if she does not please him or simply when he is in a bad mood.

One of many physical attacks Rasheed does to Mariam is when her cooking fails to meet his expectation. According to Rasheed, the rice Mariam cooks tastes so hard like pebbles. To show her how hard the rice is, he forces her to chew some pebbles he takes from the yard. "Get up," he said. "Come here. Get up" (Hosseini, 2007: 94). He snatched her hand, opened it, and dropped a handful of pebbles into it. "Put these in your mouth" "What?" "Put these in your mouth" "Stop it, Rasheed, I'm..." His powerful hands clasped her jaw. He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer. "Now chew," he said. Through the mouthful of grit and pebbles, Mariam mumbled a plea. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes. "CHEW!" he bellowed. A gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face. Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked. "Good," Rasheed said. His cheeks were quivering. "Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food and nothing else. "Then he was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood, and the fragments of two broken molars (Hosseini, 2007: 103).

Being forced to chew those pebbles, Mariam's mouth bleeds and she breaks two molars. Not only does it leave physical injuries on Mariam, but it also causes psychological effect, such as fear, anxiety and trauma. The fear, she has, leads to the loss of self-confidence. Later on, she always feels worry that Rasheed may blame her for doing something wrong. Violence that Rasheed does to Mariam is a punishment to her mistake. It shows how pervasive violence is in a strong patriarchal society like Afghanistan that it is used as a punishment. Both in domestic and public life, violence becomes a legal punishment for every mistake women do and it happens all the time throughout the story in the novel. In addition, Rasheed also uses violence to his second wife, Laila. Just like Mariam's life, Laila's is also full of beating, Laila said, It hurt to talk. Her jaw was still sore, her back and neck ached. Her lip was

swollen, and her tongue kept poking the empty pocket of the lower incisor Rasheed had knocked loose two days before. Before Mammy and Babi had died and her life turned upside down, Laila would never have believed that a human body could withstand this much beating, this viciously, this regularly, and keep functioning (Ibid:234-235).

Laila suffers from terrible physical injuries on her lips, tongue and mouth. She also loses her lower incisor. Rasheed's cruelty is depicted in the novel; the beating happens viciously and regularly. The attack occurs that much because Laila often becomes the target of Rasheed's anger towards bad things happens to him. What happens to Laila shows how powerful men are in the society that they can conduct violence as a way of expressing anger.

In a strong patriarchal society, the perpetrators of violence are not only the relatives of women such as husband and other family members, but also others. In the novel, the Taliban, who at that time took over the city from Mujahideen, undoubtedly would strike all women who break the rules they have made. This is what I shall try to depict in the next section.

3-2- The Status of Women Under Taliban and the Changing Political Conditions:

The pre-Taliban era was a bad one for the women of Afghanistan. They faced physical, psychological, sexual violence in addition to the double standards of men. Soon, the situation changes. Rosemarie Skaine in *The Women of Afghanistan under the Taliban (2005)* relates: "In September 27, 1996, the ruling members of the Afghan government were displaced by members of the Islamic Taliban movement" (qtd in Ghosh, 2013: 89). When the Taliban comes to power, more atrocities are stocked up for the women. Rasheed's affinity for the Taliban allows readers an additional insight into his sexist attitudes, and the way he can use the Taliban reign to gain even more power within his household. Moreover, I presume that the writer predicted through the character of Rasheed the fate of women under the Taliban; as for Rasheed, he is born for a Pashtun family, cruel, brutal fanatic and treating his wives so

ruthlessly. Mariam and Laila who are two generations apart, will face the same fate under the Taliban regime. Brian Forst remarks about women in Islamic societies, “In extreme cases, such as under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, women are barred from education and routinely subjected to domestic violence and gender apartheid, frequently to genital mutilation, and sometimes to severe community sanctions if their dress or conduct is regarded as even slightly provocative and hence out of line” (Ibid: 89). This is the case with the women in the novel. The laws of the Taliban are even more severe than Rasheed's have been. These rules are told to the people through loud speakers in trucks, on mosques and radio and through leaflets thrown on every street. The rules for women are as follows:

Attention women: You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about the streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a Mahram, a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home. You will not under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover with Burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten. Cosmetics are forbidden. Jewelry is forbidden. You will not wear charming clothes. You will not speak unless spoken to. You will not make eye contact with men. You will not laugh in public. If you do you will be beaten. You will not paint your nails, If you do you will lose a finger. Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately. Women are forbidden from working. If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death. Listen. Listen well. Obey. (Wahab, Youngerman, 2007, 248-249).

Such strict edicts affect all the women equally whether they are educated or uneducated. Mariam's life was bad enough, so was Laila's but the decrees of the Taliban are harsh and the penalty of defiance is even harsher as the accounts of Laila's doctor and teacher disclose. Larry P. Goodson writing about the problems in Afghanistan elucidates in *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban (2001)*, “The Taliban, however, have made the issue of women's roles and status a cornerstone of their

program. Indeed, policies toward women and girls, in conjunction with law and other policies, in many ways, constitute the centerpiece of Taliban public policy” (qtd in Mathew, 2002: 08). For the Taliban, women are disgraceful creatures. It is their dressing up, wearing jewellery, painting their nails and so on that corrupts the men, they cannot be trusted to move about alone on the streets, they are to be escorted by men wherever they go, ostensibly to protect them but actually to keep them under surveillance.

Rasheed tells Laila that they are enforcing the rules followed by the South, the East and tribal areas of Afghanistan on What according to him is the real Afghanistan, Rasheed of course supports the Taliban's anti-women stance as the directives of the Koran. He explains the implications to Laila, “Let me explain” he said. “If the fancy should strike me...I would be within my rights to give Aziza away...Or I could go to the Taliban one day, just walk in and say that I have my suspicions about you. That's all it would take” (Hosseini, 2007:252). Laila is shocked, not simply because of Rasheed's views but because she knows that every word Rasheed had uttered was true (Ibid: 253). This revelation tells closeness to the situation of women and particularly that of Laila, who has had a sexual encounter with Tariq before her marriage to Rasheed. So for Laila as for other women, Rasheed's words could literally come true. Khaled Hosseini has commented in an interview (2008), “When the Taliban came; they imposed inhumane restrictions on women, limiting their freedom of movement, expression, barring them from work and education, harassing them, humiliating them, beating them” (Interviewed by Kon, 2008:12) In the novel the evidence of this comes when Laila is repeatedly beaten up by Taliban members when she goes out alone to visit her daughter. In addition, the descriptions of the inhuman conditions in the women's hospital and the miserable circumstances there reinforce the conduct of the Taliban.

Conclusion:

Throughout this chapter, I tried to chronicle Afghanistan's political history and gave some information about the status of women since the modern monarchies era, the period between 1880 and 1919 in which kings altered some of traditional laws that were disadvantageous to women's status. But they were always faced by harsh tribal campaign, to the post monarchy period that marked a rise in women's status. Then, I tried to shed light on the Taliban's regime and the harsh conditions of women under their despotic rules.

Chapter Three:
Women's Struggle against Gender Discrimination

Introduction:

Gender discrimination is a widespread phenomenon in patriarchal societies. While men think that discriminating women is something allowed by society especially in rural areas where tribal rules still have an archaic view on the women's role, women believe that their fates are between men's hands. Therefore, both men and women have roles in the establishment of a discriminative gender system. Yet, not all women show the common attitudes towards this phenomenon. Even though, some of them accept discrimination and endure the fate of being undermined by society, others struggle bravely against it.

throughout this chapter, I will try to illustrate the ways in which the women struggle against gender discrimination by providing some influencing motives that help them to revolt against patriarchy and struggle against all the forms of deliberate authority of men against women as it is depicted in Khaled Hossein's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* including: the endeavor to flee Kabul by both protagonists Laila and Mariam, using physical strength to fight their oppressor and the importance of education in putting an end to gender discrimination.

1- Laila and Mariam's struggle against gender discrimination:

In an interview in December 12, 2008, khaled Hosseini states:

I heard so many stories about what happened to women, the tragedies that they had endured, the difficulties, the gender-based violence that they had suffered, the discrimination, the being barred from active life during the Taliban, having their movement restricted, being banned essentially from practicing their legal, social rights, political rights (London Times, 2008:8).

In the previous quotation, the author of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* speaks on the name of many women who he met in the streets of Kabul while visiting his homeland, the horrific

stories he heard from them as results of gender apartheid mode of life imposed by the Taliban and the discrimination they face because of the patriarchal phenomenon which dominates their everyday lives.

In a strong patriarchal society like Afghanistan, it has been a common phenomenon that women are defenseless to discrimination because patriarchy has strongly influenced them to be submissive. In the novel, the writer depicts what is usually done by other women in the country, which is accepting the discrimination through the character of Nana, Mariam,'s mother. Nana, being a poor servant epileptic girl, is excluded by the society for bringing disgrace. She is an epitome of the oppressed woman who believes that she is born to be discriminated and that she accepts her fate. She tries to transmit this knowledge to her daughter Mariam by teaching her how to be submissive and how women in patriarchal societies should accept that:

There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in Life, and they don't teach it in school. Look at me"..." only one skill. And it's this: Tahamul. Endure (Hosseini, 2007: 17).

And further she reflects:

This is what it means to be a woman in this world.....Learn it. Now and learn it well....a man's accusing finger always finds a woman", "It is our lot in life. Women like us. We endure (Ibid:18)

Notwithstanding, other characters Mariam and Laila become the resistant women among submissive ones in Afghanistan. Being bond by the same misfortune and destiny, they together challenge the patriarchy.

1-1- Influencing Motives:

Mariam and Laila's struggle against patriarchy is influenced by many factors, in which we cite education, consciousness and sisterhood.

1-1-1- Women's education:

Education plays a crucial role on influencing women to struggle against discrimination. It enlightens them by giving them insights and raises their consciousness about equality between men and women. In other words, education helps women to understand their rights and teaches them how to request them. This is what Hooks affirms in her book *Feminism Is for Everybody* (2000). She states that education is an underlying theory which shapes people's thought and practice in their fight against patriarchal system (Nurul,2012: 104).

I know your're still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now, he said. Marriage can wait, education cannot you're a very, very bright girl. Truly you are. You can be anything you want, Laila I know this about you. And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, maybe even more. Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila no chance (Hosseini, 2007: 114).

The quotation above portrays Laila as one of the fortunate girls, she has gone to school and encouraged by her educated father to get education instead of getting married in early age, and that she will contribute to the building of her country in the future by acknowledging the role of women in the construction of the Afghan nation. In one of his interviews, Hossieni states that:

I don't want to sound self-important, but this is a vital issue for the future of Afghanistan. If we eliminate half the population from the process of rebuilding the country, it doesn't stand a chance. Women were traditionally the backbone of the education system. Now we have a country where 80 per cent of women are illiterate (London times, 2008: 5).

After living conditions become harder because of the war between the Mujahedeen and the Soviets, Laila is banned to go to school by her father due to the circumstances; when the Mujahedeen took over Kabul, bombs are falling everywhere; it was not safe for people to stroll outside their homes. Thus, Laila's father took over the teaching duty by himself.

Laila went to into his study every day after sundown and as Hekmatyar launched his rockets at Massoud from the southern outskirts of the city, Babi and she discussed the ghazals of Hafez and the works of the beloved Afghan poet Ustad Khalilullah Khalili. Babi taught her to derive the quadratic equation, showed her how to factor polynomials and plot parametric curves (Hosseini, 2007: 174).

In the quotation above, the writer portrays the character of Hakim, a soft man who was once a junior high school teacher, still continues to teach his daughter despite the tremendous trouble the country faces.

Unlike Laila, who received formal education, Mariam had not the opportunity to reach school, but she was taught to read and write by Mullah Faizullah, the elderly village Koran tutor. He came once or twice a week to teach her Arabian words and the five prayers. In many Islamic countries students have to learn Arabic words;

It was Mullah Faizullah who had taught Mariam to read, who had patiently looked over her shoulder as her lips worked the words soundlessly, her index finger lingering beneath each word, pressing until the nail bed went white, as though she could squeeze the meaning out of the symbols. It was Mullah Faizullah who had held her hand, guided the pencil in it along the rise of each alef, the curve of each beh, the three dots of each seh (Hosseini, 2007: 16).

Mariam, although she is an illegitimate child, wishes to go to school. Mullah Faizullah does not find fault with her simple desire for education and tries to convince Nana to let her daughter get formal education "If *the girl wants to learn, let her. Let the girl have an education*" (Ibid: 17).

1-1-2- Women's Raising Awareness:

Women's consciousness is the second important factor that influences women to struggle against the discrimination. A consciousness of being discriminated will build a will and strength for women to struggle against discrimination (Nurul, 2012: 109). Laila and Mariam who are two generations apart, have different concepts about life and different levels of consciousness. Mariam who is raised by uneducated mother believes that all sufferings and misfortunes that happen to her are fate that she could not and should not change, right from the beginning we observe that she is an extension of her mother because she is also an expert at making concessions with situation begotten by destiny. Before meeting Laila, Mariam has no consciousness of being subordinate. Contrarily, Laila, who is raised by an educated father, is fully aware of her rights to get equal treatment in society.

In the novel, Hosseini describes Laila as a woman who is aware of equality between men and women. Laila's consciousness is seen throughout her attitude in facing every problem. Since she is a child, her consciousness is clearly seen on how she views education and women. When her friends at her age consider women incapable of getting education, differently Laila regards women and men deserving the same right to access education. Her view about education can be seen when she has a talk with her friend Hasina, who is arranged to marry a cousin by her father.

But Laila didn't tell Hasina that Babi had said these things, or how glad she was to have a father like him, or how proud she was of his regard for her, or how determined she was to pursue her education just as he had his. For the last two years, Laila had received the *awal numra* certificate, given yearly to the top ranked student in each grade. She said nothing of these things to Hasina, though, whose own father was an ill-tempered taxi driver who in two or three years would almost certainly give her away. Hasina had told Laila, in one of her

infrequent serious moments that it had already been decided that she would marry a first cousin who was twenty years older than her and owned an auto shop in Lahore. I've seen him twice, Hasina had said. Both times he ate with his mouth open (Hosseini, 2007: 114).

From the quotation above, it is seen that Laila is proud for having a father who is concerned with her education. It means that her and her father's concern on education goes parallel. Laila's awareness of education reflects her consciousness about women's right to be equal to men (Nurul, 2012: 99).

Additionally, Laila's consciousness also manifests itself in her awareness of being discriminated by her husband, Rasheed. Unlike Mariam, Laila from the first time she marries Rasheed has noticed that there is something wrong with her life. She is fully aware that she is so subordinate to Rasheed that he can any time oppress her. Even though it is not stated explicitly in the novel, her intention to get out from the house and ask Mariam to come with her implies her consciousness (Ibid,99) "*We're leaving this spring, Aziza and I. Come with us, Mariam*" (Hosseini,2012: 250). The quotation shows that Laila is a woman with consciousness about being subordinate and discriminated. Living together in the same house, Laila leads Mariam to the awareness about women. Mariam's discovery of awareness is seen in her shift in her attitude towards discrimination. Mariam from the first time becomes a submissive wife due to her belief that it is her destiny to serve and obey Rasheed for her life time "*where I come from, a woman's face is her husband's business only*" (Ibid: 63). She accepts his orders without any resistance. The change is later occurred after she socializes with Laila. Mariam's consciousness can be seen when she is killing Rasheed.

Rasheed didn't notice her coming back into the room. 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 (Ibid: 299).

In this quotation, Hossieni depicts how Mariam's consciousness guides her to perform her attitude to struggle against Rasheed. At the last crucial moment of her fighting with Rasheed, Mariam's mind affirms that she has become a woman with awareness of being discriminated. She is aware that Rasheed has done many miserable things to her in twenty seven years of marriage and that she will not let him hurt Laila.

1-1-3- Women's Empowerment Under the Bond of Sisterhood:

Being born a decade apart and raised by different parents, Mariam and Laila have very different ideas about life. However, they are later brought together by a same fate as Rasheed's wives. As they live and share everything together in their house, they come to form a friendship that makes them both sisters and mother-daughter to each other. The sisterhood between Mariam and Laila is not solely built by the time they meet. At the first time, the marriage of Rasheed and Laila raises tension between Mariam and her. Mariam hates Laila because according to her she has stolen her husband as Mariam says. They barely speak to each other until one day Laila stands on Mariam's side when Rasheed violates her and the hatred between them breaks, turning into love and affection (Nurul, 2012: 100). That time, Rasheed blames Mariam because Laila is not willing to have sex with him. It is actually a ban from the doctor after Laila gives birth to Aziza that she should not do sex intercourse in six weeks. The quotation below sustains what is said above

It's your doing. I know it is, he snarled, advancing on her

Mariam slid out of her bed and began backpedaling. Her arms instinctively

crossed over her chest, where he often struck her first.

What are you talking about? she stammered.

Her denying me. You're teaching her to.

I should have known that you'd corrupt her, Rasheed spat at Mariam.

He swung the belt, testing it against his own thigh. The buckle jingled loudly.

Stop it, bas! the girl said. Rasheed, you can't do this."

Go back to the room.

Mariam backpedaled again.

No! Don't do this!

Now!

Rasheed raised the belt again and this time came at Mariam.

Then an astonishing thing happened: The girl lunged at him. She

grabbed his arm with both hands and tried to drag him down, but she

could do no more than dangle from it. She did succeed in slowing

Rasheed's progress toward Mariam.

Let go! Rasheed cried.

You win. You win. Don't do this. Please, Rasheed, no beating! Please

don't do this (Hosseini, 2012: 234-235).

Rasheed turns his anger to Mariam and he beats her using his belt. Seeing Mariam is violated, Laila spontaneously stops him and says that she is willing to do what Rasheed wants. In Mariam's life, there has been no body who stands by her side before Laila. Laila's sacrifice for Mariam makes their relationship better. After that incident, they both know that they are no longer enemies. They begin to sit and enjoy the afternoon together, sharing stories before meeting each other. When Aziza passed gas in her sleep, Laila began to laugh, and Mariam joined in. They laughed like this, at each other's reflection in the mirror, their eyes tearing, and the moment was so natural, so effortless, that suddenly Mariam started telling her about Jalil and Nana. Laila stood with her hands idle on Mariam's shoulders, eyes locked on Mariam's face in the mirror. Out the words came, like blood gushing from an artery. Mariam told her about Bibi jo, Mullah Faizullah, the humiliating journey to Jalil's house, Nana's suicide. She told about Jalil's wives, and the hurried wedding with Rasheed, the trip to Kabul, her pregnancies, the endless cycles of hope and disappointment, Rasheed's turning on her.

After, Laila sat at the foot of Mariam's chair. Absently, she removed a piece of lint entangled in Aziza's hair. A silence ensued. "I have something to tell you too," Laila said (Hosseini, 2012: 249). Mariam tells Laila everything she experiences since she was a kid, including the most painful accident especially Nana's suicide and her marriage life with Rasheed. On her turn, Laila also tells Mariam her shameful secret that the reason she marries Rasheed is because of Tariq's baby in her belly.

As they experience many things together, the bond between them grows stronger. Mariam and Laila learn a lot from each other. Mariam, on the one hand learns the truth behind the patriarchy from Laila and on the other hand, Laila learns so much about endurance from Mariam. Mariam gets the awareness that she is subordinated and is discriminated by Jalil.

Being together, they gain their strength and gather their efforts to struggle against discrimination.

2- Forms of Struggle

Mariam's and Laila's courage and strength to struggle against discrimination are not solely found that way. Their consciousness, education, and sisterhood are what encourage them to struggle. Moreover, living together in the same house has made Mariam and Laila influence each other. The educated Laila influences Mariam and on the contrary, the patient Mariam also does the same. They struggle against discrimination by working together in sisterhood to escape from Kabul and run to Pakistan, using physical strength to kill Rasheed and using education to end patriarchy (Nurul, 2012: 100)

2-2- Women's Solidarity and Self determination:

As Mariam and Laila are bond in sisterhood, they empower each other in facing every problem in their lives. Being together, they gain the strength to struggle against Rasheed's abuses and oppression. Laila tells Mariam that they can free themselves from discrimination by leaving Kabul and moving to Pakistan. Mariam, who has been living with Rasheed for more than fourteen years never thinks of this idea before. She is too afraid to run away from the house. Mariam even has no courage to confront Rasheed when he insults or violates her. However, she is convinced by Laila's hope of a new better life for them in Pakistan. It is actually Laila's idea to run from Kabul and move to Pakistan. Before asking Mariam to come with her, Laila has prepared this plan alone for about one year. After giving birth to Aziza, Laila steals money from Rasheed's pocket when he is not around. Laila steals a little money in order not to make Rasheed doubtful. Then, in spring morning in 1994, Mariam, Laila and Aziza leave the house. When Rasheed is working, they pack things, get out of the house and stop the taxi to bring them to the Lahore Gate bus station. Mariam was in the doorway. Laila

could tell that she hadn't slept either. She wondered if Mariam too had been seized all night by short time of joy and attacks of mouth drying anxiety.

On the day, they both feel joy of getting a new better life. Laila cannot even sleep a night before they leave. This is the prevalent rebellion that Laila and Mariam do to Rasheed.

As Mariam and Laila arrive at Lahore Gate bus station, they face the hardest and riskiest thing to do in their plan which is finding a man who is willing to pretend to be their relative or Mahram. After discussing for a while about whom they will trust to be their Mahram, they finally find the most suitable one: a man with soft eyes and kind face. Laila later talks to him, as it is seen in the dialogue below.

Forgive me, brother, but are you going to Peshawar?

Yes, he said, squinting.

I wonder if you can help us. Can you do us a favor?

He passed the boy to his wife. He and Laila stepped away.

What is it, hamshira?

She was encouraged to see that he had soft eyes, a kind face. She told him

the story that she and Mariam had agreed on. She was a biwa, she said, a

widow. She and her mother and daughter had no one left in Kabul.

They were going to Peshawar to stay with her uncle.

You want to come with my family, the young man said

I know it's zahma¹t for you. But you look like a decent brother, and I

"Don't worry, hamshir²a I understand. It's no trouble. Let me go and buy your tickets.

Thank you, brother. This is sawab, a good deed. God will remember. (Hosseini, 2007:254-255)

To the man, Laila tells him that on the one hand, she is a widow and Mariam is her mother. The man then agrees to buy them the bus tickets to Pakistan and to pretend to be their relative. On the other hand, Mariam never stops uttering her prayer. The man easily says yes to Laila and for a while Laila and Mariam feel relieved.

Unfortunately, when they are about to enter the bus, scandalously the man tells the authority that Laila and Mariam are women who run away from their house. At the end, they are arrested in a police station. Although Mariam and Laila fail to run to Pakistan, but their struggle to run away implies that they are women who have freed themselves from the patriarchal framework. They are aware of being discriminated and are brave enough in trying to get liberated.

By trying to escape from Kabul, Mariam and Laila have proven themselves as liberated women. It is because the essence of being liberated women is the process of struggling itself instead of the result of the struggle. At the same time, their effort also shows that sisterhood influences women's struggle towards liberation. If they never meet each other, they would not be able to do such a risky thing. Their sisterhood is so powerful that it can strengthen Laila and change Mariam to be a brave one (Nurul, 2012: 104).

¹ - A Farsi word, meaning: discomfort

² - Sibling, sister

2-2- Women from Self- determination to Self-defense:

In a patriarchal society, women are discouraged to feel anger because they are prohibited and punished to express it. The society considers it inappropriate for women to get angry or curse people. Moreover, using physical strength as a means to express anger is really unforgivable. For instance, a wife who beats her husband in return to his violence can be told as a dishonorable wife and the husband may feel ashamed for having a wife like her. Thus, most women, including Mariam before meeting Laila, commonly fear of rebellion towards men.

Mariam is a submissive wife who never turns her anger to Rasheed. Yet, Laila is a different kind of woman. She is an educated woman who is really aware of her right and knows how to claim them. Education and family background also shape Laila to be a brave woman such as to be brave to express her anger to Rasheed.

The first time Laila uses her physical strength to fight Rasheed is when he asks Aziza to be a street beggar due to his bankruptcy. Rasheed slaps Laila, for she strongly refuses Rasheed's idea. In her turn, Laila beats him back.

The slap made a loud smacking sound, the palm of his thick fingered hand connecting squarely with the meat of Laila's cheek. It made her head whip around. It silenced the noises from the kitchen. For a moment, the house was perfectly quiet. Then a flurry of hurried footsteps in the hallway before. Mariam and the children were in the living room, their eyes shifting from her to Rasheed and back. Then Laila punched him. It was the first time she'd struck anybody, discounting the playful punches she and Tariq used to trade. But those had been open fisted; more pats than punches, self consciously friendly, comfortable expressions of anxieties that were both perplexing and thrilling. They would aim for the muscle that Tariq, in a professorial voice, called the deltoid Laila watched the arch of her closed fist, slicing through the air, felt the crinkle of Rasheed's stubbly, coarse skin under her knuckles. It made a sound like dropping a rice bag to the floor. She hit him hard. The impact

actually made him stagger two steps backward (Hosseini, 2012: 292).

The quotation shows that for Laila it is the first time she attacks anybody. When she was adolescent, she used to practice how to punch and defend herself from anybody's attacks with Tariq and now she really punched Rasheed. Laila does it so hard that it makes Rasheed walk unsteadily two steps backward.

Another fight occurs when Rasheed knows that Laila speaks with Tariq, Aziza's biological father, who comes back after years passing and is considered dead. Later, Rasheed pays a man to lie to her that Tariq is dead and she is easily deceived. Knowing that Laila has met Tariq, Rasheed tortures Laila violently. In return, she uses all her strength to fight him back.

But just as he was bearing down on her, Mariam saw Laila behind him pick something up from the ground. She watched Laila's hand rise overhead, hold, then come swooping down against the side of his face. Glass shattered. The jagged remains of the drinking glass rained down to the ground. There was blood on Laila's hands, blood flowing from the open gash on Rasheed's cheek, blood down his neck, on his shirt. He turned around, all snarling teeth and blazing eyes (Hosseini, 2007: 339).

In the quotation above, Hosseini described the scene where Laila and Rasheed are involved in a hard, violent fight. The fight is actually begun by a beat Rasheed does to Laila. Later, both of them punch and beat each other. When Laila gets a chance, she picks a glass and with that, she hits Rasheed until he is bleeding. Jealousy and hatred as well as blood are everywhere. For Laila, this is the peak of her anger of being discriminated and doped in her whole marriage life.

Seeing Rasheed tortures Laila violently, Mariam cannot hold herself. Her love for Laila has made her stronger than she can ever imagine. It is never in her life, she fights someone like this time. Mariam claws at Rasheed and beats him. She also bits his fingers, which is

choking Laila's neck. Below is the situation of the fight. Mariam clawed at him. She beat at his chest. She hurled herself against him. She struggled to uncurl his fingers from Laila's neck. She bit them.

But they remained tightly clamped around Laila's wind pipe, and Mariam saw that he meant to carry this through.

...

In the toolshed, Mariam grabbed the shovel.

...

Mariam steadied her feet and tightened her grip around the shovel's handle. She raised it. She said his name. She wanted him to see.

"Rasheed."

He looked up.

Mariam swung.

She hit him across the temple. The blow knocked him off Laila. ...

And so Mariam raised the shovel high, raised it as high as she could, arching it so it touched the small of her back. 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, 2007: 339-341).

Since Rasheed's is too strong, he could shot them at once, but Mariam goes to the tool shed to pick something she can use to fight Rasheed; she grabs a shovel then. With it, she hits him so hard on his temple that it can get rid of his fingers holding Laila's neck. Then, once again, Mariam raises the shovel high, turning its sharp edge vertical, and with everything she has, she kills Rasheed on the spot.

Mariam finds liberation when she is killing Rasheed since it is the first time for her to decide the course of her own life. Before this fight, she never releases her anger; all she does is only enduring all things that falls over her.

Using physical strength to fight the oppressor, Mariam and Laila have broken the stereotype that women are powerless because in fact, they have power to fight Rasheed, their oppressor.

2-3- Education and Gender Discrimination:

Education can be a means to end gender discrimination. It gives insight to people about equality between men and women. It shapes men's way of thinking not to discriminate women and it influences women's attitudes to struggle against the discrimination. Since education deals with people's mind, its role in ending discrimination may not be as visible as physical attacks to the oppressors or running away from the place where women are discriminated. However, even though it works invisibly, it is very crucial in ending discrimination; it can prevent men from discriminating women and make women aware of being discriminated. In long term, it can eliminate male's domination in a society.

Educated women can also empower others, as Laila raises Mariam's awareness and empowers her to struggle against discrimination. From the beginning of the novel, it is told that Laila is raised by a father who emphasizes the importance of education. Her father always tells her that education has an important role in changing people and it can make women's lives in Afghanistan better.

Being aware of the importance of education, Laila volunteers to teach in the orphanage in which Aziza stays when her family is in bankruptcy.

The children are taking their seats, flipping notebooks open, chattering Aziza is talking to a girl in the adjacent row. A paper airplane floats across the room in a high arc. Someone tosses it back. Open your Farsi books, children, Laila says, dropping her own books on her desk (Hosseini, 2007: 400).

The quotation above is the illustration when Laila teaches the students. The students sit in their chairs, ready with their own books. The lesson starts when Laila asks her students to open their Farsi books. The end of the novel gives hopes to women in Afghanistan as its story ends up with a condition where women can access education.

Conclusion:

Throughout this chapter, I have endeavored to depict the influencing motives that helped both Mariam and Laila to struggle discrimination exerted over them in their marital life. Furthermore, I have exposed how Mariam's and Laila's struggles against discrimination ultimately alter the course not just of their own lives but of the next generation. By fighting Rasheed, Mariam and Laila have freed themselves from sufferings and by becoming a teacher, Laila provides better life for the next generation. Nana, Mariam and Laila are the representations of Afghan women, who suffer from complex gender discrimination. A patriarchal system has strongly influenced most women to be submissive ones, one of whom

is Nana. Her acceptance of discrimination is a common phenomenon within the society. While discriminating women, a patriarchal society also implants the belief that above all sufferings that women experience, all they can do is only enduring. Since women do not show their objection, men keep discriminating them. In other words, the patriarchal framework perpetuates gender discrimination in the society. On the contrary, Mariam and Laila choose another path; they bravely struggle against the discrimination. They are bound together in a sisterhood that empowered and helped each other. Mariam and Laila prove that women are able to struggle for their rights. By struggling against discrimination and dismantling the belief that women should endure sufferings, they really can gain liberation.

General Conclusion

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My analysis of the status of women in Afghanistan in Khaled Hopsseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has allowed me to draw some conclusions dealing essentially with the relationship between the content and the context of the novel, the changing political scene, and the establishment of a gender apartheid system which led to the discrimination of women.

In the first part of my dissertation, I have attempted to provide a short synopsis of the novel, the author's biography, the theoretical frame work as well as the socio- historical background of the novel. The study has enabled me to point out the specific historical event which is the Taliban's takeover of Kabul and their establishment of a complete discriminative system towards women.

Having exposed the historical and the literary background of the novel, I have moved to analyze to the status of women in Afghanistan by giving a brief background of women's status before the Taliban took control of all the Afghan territory. I have attempted to chronicle Afghanistan's political history in order to highlight the sporadic efforts made by the leaders to enhance women's status from the modern monarchies to the rule of Taliban.

The rise of Taliban and the status of women is one of the important concepts in Hossein's novel. The writer throughout his work tried to depict lives of Afghan women under the preceding regimes and differentiate between the rural and urban lives which were completely heterogenic. Before the Taliban reign, an intense reform happened in the lives of women and their rights were protected by the constitution. By 1970's 70% of university teachers were women, 40% of Afghan women dominated the healthcare service, 20% of women were governors.

General Conclusion

My Feminist reading of the novel has also brought to light other aspects of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. This novel, inspired by real facts and historical evidence, contains a warning message to women that mainly criticize the influence of men's power under patriarchy which sustained by the authorities under despotic regimes like the Taliban over women's rights. This form of power leads to the discrimination of women.

This is exactly what happened to women in Afghanistan during several decades, but under the Taliban more atrocities are stocked up for the women, schools for girls were closed, women are banned from walking alone in the streets, they are deprived from working and stay at their homes. In other term they were secluded from public life and jailed in their homes. As a result, thousands of women chose to flee the country to a safer place and live as refugees in the bordering countries, other were begging in the streets with their children because of the starvation or they turn to prostitution in order to assure their families incomes.

After the September 11, 2001, The United States aided by Mojahedeen, attacked Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban. A new liberal president Hamid Karazai was installed and get an Afghan assembly, including women delegates. Consequently, women are encouraged to go to school, to work and confront the public sphere. Many of the refugees returned to their homeland and help in building of new Afghanistan. At the end of Hossein's novel, Laila decides to return to her homeland and fulfilling her father's dream that she will contribute to the building of a new Afghanistan and participate in the emancipation of thousands of Afghani women.

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