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**KHALED HOSSEINI'S A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS: AN
ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS**



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Abstract

This research paper investigates Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns using an ecofeminist framework to illustrate the interrelationship between violence against women and violence against nature within Afghanistan's patriarchal and war-damaged society. Through a qualitative approach and close reading, the study shows how natural imagery of dust, drought, ruins, and sunlight reflects the emotional and physical injuries suffered by the female characters in the novel. The research builds on theorists of ecofeminism such as Shiva, Warren, and Plumwood to establish Mariam as representative of endurance and sacrifice, and Laila as representative of renewal and hope, illustrating theoretical concepts of resilience and regeneration in ecofeminism. The findings suggest that both women and the environment are devastated in similar ways under the weight of patriarchal oppression. The research concludes that not only does Hosseini illustrate the connected suffering of women and land, but he also demonstrates a vision for transformation through resilience, rebuilding, and solidarity against oppression.

Key words: patriarchal, war-damaged society, ecofeminism, violence and nature.

Introduction

This research is an attempt to delve into the soul of such a literary masterpiece, "A Thousand Splendid Suns" by Khaled Hosseini, from an ecofeminist perspective to disclose how women and nature fall prey to patriarchy and are exploited, and also the connection between women and nature. Ecofeminism calls for the conservation of both. The study endeavours to highlight the catastrophe faced by women and the environment in a typical war-struck patriarchal Afghan society, and how it is related to our society and struggles. The word Ecofeminism is a combination of two concepts: feminism and ecology. Ecofeminism emerged in the late twentieth century as a critique of the patriarchal worldview. It is a branch of feminism that explores the historical connection between nature and women. According to this theory, women and nature are connected, and both of them are degraded by patriarchal norms. Ecofeminists demand equal rights for all and also strive for environmental stewardship. In 1974, French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced Ecofeminism to the world by suggesting that the earth was on the verge of destruction due to "patriarchal unlimitism"—the entitlement of men to unending power over women and nature (d'Eaubonne, 1974). It was a wake-up call connecting the liberation of women to the protection of the earth. Over the next few decades, Ecofeminism began to evolve into an international movement, demonstrating that women were often the first to act in defence of the environment, as seen in women's protests such as the anti-nuclear Greenham Common protests in England and the Chipko Movement in India. Scholars began to see that women's daily responsibilities of fetching water, collecting wood, farming, and caring for families often put them face to face with the natural world, meaning when their environment suffered, they would suffer first (Mellor, 1997). Eventually, Ecofeminism evolved into many branches of cultural, spiritual, socialist, and materialist ecofeminism, but in principle, all types of Ecofeminism stem from the idea that the domination of women and the domination of nature emanate from the same patriarchal lineage (Merchant, 1995). This idea is at the centre of ecofeminist literary criticism.

Ecofeminist theorists contend that women have been historically aligned with nature. Sometimes this relationship is cultural, sometimes biological, sometimes even symbolic. As Karen Warren (2000) points out, it has traditionally been the case within patriarchal societies that both women and nature are considered nurturing, emotional, passive, and therefore "easier to dominate." This way of thinking creates what she describes as a "logic of domination" - a frame of reference that legitimizes the domination of those deemed inferior, whether that is a woman or the natural world. Vandana Shiva (1988) also points out that women always have a better sense of nature than men, precisely because women engage in sustaining life through motherhood, domestic labour, and

agricultural labour. When forests are clear-cut or rivers run dry, it is typically women who walk further, struggle more, and carry the burden. This association makes Ecofeminism especially productive in relation to reading stories about women who live and struggle in tough wartime contexts, such as Afghanistan.

Ecofeminism maintains that patriarchy is more than just an ideology of male power; it is a complete structure based on hierarchy and domination. As Warren (2000) observes, patriarchy values qualities such as aggression and control and disregards qualities such as compassion and interdependence, qualities associated with women. Val Plumwood (1993) asserts that patriarchy sustains itself by fragmenting the world into pairs of opposite straws: man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion, strong/weak. Such divisions facilitate tipping everything on the "lower" side of the dividing pair as lesser. And in this way, both women and nature are vulnerable to exploitation as a result. This idea becomes especially apparent in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where the oppression of women in the home and the destruction of Afghanistan's surrounding environment can both be traced back to fundamentally the same patriarchal orientation.

Ecofeminist literary critics examine how authors invoke nature, landscape, and environmental imagery to make suggestions regarding women's lives. Gaard (1993) argues that literature often conveys the values and inequities of the societies in which they were created. Additionally, where women and land are both portrayed as innocent suffering, the symbolism often indicates systemic structural exploitation within the culture. Writers often use nature, storms, desolate land, rivers, and seasons to indicate feelings or signify oppression. King (1989) points out that in patriarchal texts, devastated landscapes often correlate with the internal deterioration of female characters. Eventually, when the landscape heals or begins to bloom again, it may signify hope and renewal. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the persistent dust storms, droughts, blown-up homes, and bombed fields are more than just contextual details; they show the destruction of Mariam's and Laila's lives.

Most researchers studying *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have considered its feminist aspects. They focus on issues like domestic abuse, forced marriage, motherhood, education, and women's resilience. Rostami and Bahar (2016) and others document how Hosseini gives a voice to Afghan women who, for far too long, have been silenced. Yet, almost all these researchers read the novel only through feminism, not Ecofeminism. They examine women's suffering, but do not represent how natural imagery, environmental destruction, and the patriarchy that dominates the land influence women's suffering.

Ecofeminism not only focuses on the oppression, but also stresses resistance and regeneration. Women's connection with nature equips them with strengths for survival and renewal.

Shiva (1988) argues that women are often some of the most potent agents of ecological and social regeneration, particularly in the wake of destruction from patriarchy, unrest, or war. As mothers, caregivers, nurturers, and community-builders, they are located at the centre of healing and reconstruction. Literature often captures this regenerative capacity by portraying women as figures of hope and renewal, or the protagonists of the rebirth of the natural world. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila represents this ecofeminist spirit of rebirth. She has experienced tremendous trauma, displacement, and loss, but she ultimately returns to Kabul, fully committed to rebuilding her home and to becoming an integral part of the educational structure within Kabul. Laila's decision to return to Afghanistan and to be involved in the reconstruction of Kabul signals not only a recovery of the social structure but also a regeneration of life, land, and community in the wake of destruction. What Laila accomplishes, through the lens of Ecofeminism, marks the regeneration of the environment and humanity after the extensive consequences of oppression.

Another key ecofeminist theme in the novel is the importance of sisterhood or women's solidarity. Plumwood (1993) states that patriarchal systems strive to foster isolation among women in order to reduce their potential for power, while Ecofeminism revels in connection, collaboration, and collective resistance. The relationship between Mariam and Laila showcases the transformative power of female connection (Shah, A. S. A. A. 2023). Within the threatening and violent space of Rasheed's home, Mariam and Laila's solidarity develops a micro community that fosters emotional strength and mutual survivability. Ecofeminist literary critics often read these

bonding relationships as representative of the kinds of relationships that need to be fostered between humans and non-humans (or nature) relationships based on care, interconnectedness, and mutual protection. The natural world requires nurturing to thrive in the same way that women, in patriarchal contexts, often depend on each other to cope with and resist systemic violence.

Motherhood additionally occupies a vital place in ecofeminist theory. Although patriarchal paradigms usually act to coerce motherhood in order to legitimize women's continued subjugation and relegation to the domestic sphere, ecofeminist scholars like Mies and Shiva (1993) redefine motherhood as a site of empowerment, mutual care, and ecological knowledge. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila's motherhood exemplifies this reworking of motherhood and female caregiving. Laila's self-sacrifice, courage, and commitment to her children exemplify the ecofeminist value of interdependence, as does Laila's involvement in rebuilding Kabul and in promoting pedagogy for the good life for children; she models the nurturing and life-affirming ecologies valued in Ecofeminism. Laila's role as a mother signifies the continuation of regeneration for both the social and environmental spheres, restating the idea that caring and ecological practice are always interrelated.

Although *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has been examined extensively through feminist and socio-political lenses, the ecofeminist aspect is often overlooked. The gaps include: very few studies bring women's suffering into relation with environmental devastation and destruction. The use of natural imagery to signify patriarchal violence remains absent. A comprehensive article that sees gender, war, culture, and ecology together is lacking. Overall, this research intended to fills an important academic gap by demonstrating how the oppression of women and nature are interconnected throughout the novel.

Besides, this research addresses the problem that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* showcases women's social and emotional misery. However, little research has been done on how Khaled Hosseini has used natural imagery to portray women's oppression. The problem is to point out how Hosseini constructs a relationship between environmental degradation and the exploitation of women, exposing the brutality of a typical Afghan society as well as the resistance from the Afghan women.

Objectives:

1. To interpret the selected novel to bring forward the oppression of women and the environment.
2. To analyse the characters of Mariam and Laila through the lens of Ecofeminism.
3. To identify the role of Afghan culture and war in the subjugation of women and the environment.

Questions:

1. How does "A Thousand Splendid Suns" highlight the interrelated suppression of environment and women?
2. What Ecofeminist traits do the characters Mariam and Laila represent?
3. How do war and Afghan culture torment women and environment?

Methodology:

The research is a qualitative insight into the selected novel "A Thousand Splendid Suns" by Khaled Hosseini. The qualitative method is selected for this research as it is a suitable approach to analyse, interpret, examine and critique any text. The primary method of this study is close reading to explore the connection between the environment and women, as shown in the novel. This method is employed to answer the whys and how of human behavior, opinion, and experience information (Ullah, 2020).

This study takes Ecofeminism as its main theoretical framework. It is a critical framework that, among other things, points to the interconnectedness of women's and nature's oppressions. Hence, this paper, with the help of ecofeminist theory, analyses how Khaled Hosseini depicts women's suffering, their resistance, and metaphorical identification with nature in the patriarchal, war-ridden society of Afghanistan through his novel

A Thousand Splendid Suns. The use of an ecofeminist perspective makes it easier to uncover how the novel reflects broader social and environmental injustices, linking the personal and ecological dimensions of oppression.

Data for this research were gathered by closely reading Khaled Hosseini's novel entitled A Thousand Splendid Suns. Since the study follows a qualitative approach, the primary source of data was the novel itself. The text was read several times to identify the key themes, symbols, and narrative moments that related to Ecofeminism. Particular attention was given to the descriptions of nature, environmental conditions, war-torn landscapes, and scenes of women's oppression and resistance. Relevant quotes and passages were extracted and grouped together into thematic categories, including patriarchy, environmental degradation, war, female solidarity, and regeneration. Later, these themes were interpreted in the light of some ecofeminist theories propounded by Shiva (1988), Warren (2000), and Plumwood (1993). The secondary data collection was supported by scholarly books, journal articles, and academic publications regarding Ecofeminism and feminist literary criticism. These sources helped in theoretical support and fortified the analysis. No human participants were used; all data were collected through

Discussion:

It conducts a detailed ecofeminist analysis of "A Thousand Splendid Suns", highlighting how Khaled Hosseini intertwines the oppression of women with the degradation of the environment within the patriarchal and war-torn landscape of Afghanistan. It draws on textual evidence, symbolic imagery, and ecofeminist theories to gain insight into how women's suffering, environmental destruction, and patriarchal culture are presented as interconnected forces in the novel. In this light, the lives of Mariam and Laila reflect the broader ecofeminist argument that the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature emanate from the same social, cultural, and political grounds.

The Interconnected Oppression of Women and Nature:

Ecofeminism reveals how patriarchy constructs a system of hierarchy whereby men, in elevating themselves above both women and nature, legitimize their domination over both. Parallel oppression is strongly demonstrated in A Thousand Splendid Suns, as the novel has natural imagery constantly reflecting the emotional and physical suffering of Afghan women. Kabul is described again and again as a city choked with dust, rubble, and smoke on the rise, conditions symbolically portraying the state of suffocation that Mariam and Laila endured under Rasheed's household. Similarly, Mariam's early life in the empty, desolate landscape reflects her being a harami, unwanted and pushed to the fringes of society. As she grows older, dryness and dust in Kabul reflect the emptiness, loneliness, and violence through which her marriage will take shape. Thus, the devastated land of Afghanistan becomes a metaphor for the devastated women's lives. "The streets, once bustling and full of life, were now cratered and strewn with rubble...The gardens were gone, the trees cut down for firewood during the siege" (A Thousand Splendid Suns, 2007). This quote from the novel shows how nature is degraded.

The isolation of Afghan women also extends to the isolation of nature. Women throughout the novel are silenced and isolated physically, emotionally, and socially; their voices are repressed, their agency diminished, and their experiences ignored. Similarly, the natural world around them continuously deteriorates; flowers and trees die as gardens disintegrate, rivers dry up, and whole neighbourhoods start crumbling under the pressure of recurrent bombings. Neither women nor the environment receives much-needed care and nurture to thrive. Society's dislike for women's well-being mirrors the disregard shown to the very earth they occupy. This interwoven and holistic suffering corroborates the ecofeminist argument that patriarchal domination destroys human and ecological life in almost parallel ways.

Ecofeminist Traits in Mariam and Laila:

Ecofeminist discourse generally portrays women in relation to endurance, compassion, and renewal. Mariam bears the hallmarks of endurance and silent resistance. Her life is full of hardship, yet she remains emotionally steady and resilient. Like the soil of Afghanistan, which has been trampled upon, ignored, and exploited, yet still holds depth and strength, so does Mariam hold within her a certain quiet power that emerges at decisive moments of the narrative. The moment when she kills Rasheed in order to save Laila represents a point of ecofeminist revolt-a refusal to be passive in the face of untrammelled patriarchal violence. This act frees Laila but symbolizes the earth's tendency to resist when pushed beyond its limits. The tragedy of Mariam's death becomes a symbolic sacrifice that allows new life and hope to emerge. In ecofeminist terms, her sacrifice resembles the seasonal cycle of nature, where there is destruction, and renewal often follows.

Laila is primarily associated with images of light and warmth, with rebirth even in the darkest situations. She is hopeful, determined, and deeply connected to ideas of growth and change. Not only is her decision to return to Kabul after the fall of the Taliban a demonstration of her personal strength, but it also becomes symbolic for her position as a role model within Afghan society. She becomes a teacher, dedicates herself to nurturing children, and participates in the rebuilding of the orphanage. These acts, therefore, align closely with the ecofeminist views that women, upon gaining power, manage to bring healing to society as well as the environment. By means of Laila's character, the novel would point to the view that the reparation of human relationships and the reparation of land constitute interrelated processes.

War and Culture as Forces of Ecological and Feminine Destruction:

In the novel, war is depicted as an unequivocally patriarchal force, stemming from aggression, power, and domination. The effects of war are also greatly evident on women and the environment. Bombings level homes and natural landscapes, leaving dust-filled air, broken streets, and barren fields in their wake. As such, it corresponds to the emotional devastation of Afghan women, whose lives are torn asunder by loss, displacement, and violence. This notion of destruction is intensified through the Taliban regime, which enforces harsh restrictions on women: they are forbidden from pursuing education, holding jobs, travelling alone, or even leaving their homes without a male family member. These laws shrink the identity of women and confine them to suffocating domestic spaces, reflecting the way war shrinks and confines the natural world, wresting life and vitality from it (Shah, A. S. A. A. 2024). The cultural norms of Afghanistan also play a big role in furthering the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment. This patriarchal conception of honour casts women under a shadow of constant control, regarding them as mere extensions of a man's reputation rather than humans with agency. Similarly, land is dealt with as property to be commanded, divided, and exploited. In both cases, value is defined from a male perspective, with the vulnerability of women and nature being denied. Rasheed, in his behaviour in the household, reflects this larger cultural pattern; he assumes complete authority, treating both Mariam and Laila as property, not human beings. The domestic sphere becomes a microcosm of Afghan society, showing how domination inside the home mirrors domination of the land. By drawing such a parallel, Hosseini emphasizes that such cultural and environmental crises are deeply interrelated, each nourishing the other.

Findings:

This discussion wraps up the research study by providing a brief overview of the findings and conclusions from the ecofeminist analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The study sought to investigate the oppression of women and nature in Afghanistan, how Mariam and Laila can be read as exemplars of ecofeminist attributes, and how war and culture help explain gendered and environmental suffering. Findings not only reveal the ecofeminist implications of Hosseini's work but also sound the broader complexities of gender justice and environmental justice in conflictual situations.

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The examination of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through an ecofeminist lens makes clear that Khaled Hosseini suggests a profound connection between women's oppression and environmental degradation. The narrative demonstrates, without question, that both women and the natural environment suffer at the hands of a violent and militarized, male-dominated social structure in Afghanistan. It is throughout the novel's depiction of the desolate landscapes of Kabul—a city of broken streets, dust, collapsed houses, and empty gardens—that the wounded nature of women in Afghanistan becomes apparent. The city's "wounded" image is an indication of the marked emotional and physical injury that Mariam, Laila, and other women in similar circumstances endure. The numerous juxtaposed images are a suggestion that the oppression of women is not only akin to nature but rather a function of similar structures of violence and domination.

Khaled Hosseini often uses natural metaphors to connect women with their tenacity and capacity to rejuvenate. Mariam is often compared to the earth—calm, stable, and enduring. As a figure of patience and silence, Mariam absorbs decades of pain like "the stillness of the ground" absorbs the trauma of war. On the other hand, Laila, who, over time, symbolizes light, warmth, and growth. She serves to exemplify hope, especially when she physically brings life back into places destroyed by war. These natural descriptions are consistent with ecofeminist views that women have a spiritual and emotional connection to nature, particularly when they suffer under systems that exploit both entities.

The characters of Mariam and Laila exhibit ecofeminist traits that balance one another. Mariam embodies silent fortitude and sacrifice. Her ultimate act of killing Rasheed represents a confrontational act of ecofeminist resistance by actively breaking up the cycles of violence that destroy women's sense of self and threaten the "ecological" equilibrium of a household. Mariam's happiest memories exist with nature in spaces like the clearing next to the kolba, hinting at the possibility that nature may be the only refuge from humanity's cruelty. Laila represents regeneration and transformative energy. Her quest to escape Rasheed, defend her children, and her eventual contributions to Kabul's educational system all signify ecofeminist activism. Laila's return to the city, especially in her efforts to re-establish the orphanage after the Taliban fall, suggests environmental and cultural renewal. Through these two characters, Hosseini shows how women can be both oppressed victims and enact restorative power.

The study illustrates that war in Afghanistan, combined with cultural traditions, serves as a double-edged sword which impacts women and the environment negatively. The war, which has lasted for decades in Afghanistan, diminishes forests, houses, trees, and also farmland, rendering the territory uninhabitable. This structural dismantling is matched by the dismantling of families, loss of loved ones, coercion into unsafe marriages, and confinement of women into limited domestic roles. The bomb that obliterates Laila's parents is an example of this double jeopardy; the bomb devastates the physical residing place, but also disrupts the emotional foundation of her life. Afghan patriarchal traditions (example: forced marriage, obsession with honour, imprisoning female bodies) all subject women as objects to be held accountable, similar to how territory is treated as property. Rasheed acts on this principle with his wives as he determines their worth based on obedience to him, reproduction, and silence.

This oppression is enforced under the Taliban regime, as their rules confine women indoors, ban education, restrict movement, and erase women from public life. Simultaneously, they destroy gardens, cultural monuments, and public spaces, contributing to the environmental desolation of Kabul. Under their governance, both nature and women lose their vibrancy and agency. The city becomes colourless, just as women's identities are suppressed under layers of enforced silence and veiling. These findings illustrate that both patriarchal culture and militarised conflict support systems of domination that simultaneously harm women and nature, a reinforcement of ecofeminist claims of the holistic operation of oppression across gender and environmental lines.

Conclusion:

The paper concludes that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* powerfully illustrates the ecofeminist idea that the

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oppression of women and the degradation of the environment stem from the same patriarchal and militarized systems. Hosseini looks to the ruined landscapes of Kabul to mirror the emotional and physical sufferings of Afghan women, showing that both nature and women are treated as expendable under structures of domination. Through the characters of Mariam and Laila, the novel identifies two essential ecofeminist traits: silent resilience and transformative regeneration. While Mariam is a symbol of survival and sacrifice, Laila would be identified with hope, renewal, and social rebuilding. Their experiences show that just like nature itself, women can bear the hardships and restore broken communities. The novel also suggests that war and rigid cultural norms intensify harm toward both women and the environment, and that true social healing requires the upliftment and protection of both. Ultimately, the story affirms that societies can progress only if women and the natural world are respected, considered important, and allowed to flourish.

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