

Double Oppression of Women in Khalid Hussein's Thousand Splendid Suns and Alice Walker's The Color Purple

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ABSTRACT: The present study is intended to shed light on the double oppression that occurs to women in the patriarchal culture. In numerous cultures around the world, women are unfairly treated and oppressed regularly. They are marginalized and victimized because of their gender and race. For that reason, the primary target of postcolonial feminists is to oppose the inequality and inferiority experienced by women as a result of racial and cultural dominance. Feminist writers tend to set out on a mission to eliminate all forms of women oppression. In this regard, literature in general, and fiction in particular, satisfies their need to expose their predicament to the rest of the world in order to prove their existence and empower women to achieve the ability to determine themselves. Also, the study aims to investigate the concept of women's double oppression which is perfectly depicted in Afro- American writer Alice Walker's *Color Purple* and Afghan- American author Khalid Hussein's *Thousand Splendid Suns*. The two novels are considered among the best written novels in the history of English Literature. *Color Purple* depicts all the events that Alice Walker's family experienced and had a profound negative impact on her psych, whereas *Thousand Splendid Suns* tends to defend women from negative ideologies that created by Taliban's authority in order to dehumanize and depress women. Ultimately, the paper concludes that both authors desire to demonstrate the power of women when they unit together and rebel against the oppressive authority.

Keywords: *Color Purple*, Double Oppression, feminism, Patriarch Culture, *Thousand Splendid Suns*.

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of English literature, women are struggling to reach equality in the male dominated society. They have been using literature for the sake of demonstrating against the system that has placed them under the men's control. In several cultures, women are treated as second- class citizens. During the 20th century, a number of social and political changes occurred, leading to the growth of the Movement of Feminism which targeted to oppose the beliefs that men employ oppression as a strategy to keep patriarchy alive.

It is worth mentioning that, the form of oppression that most commonly affects women is that they are considered to be inferior in a traditional, religious, restricted, and male dominant society. Continuous verbal and physical abuse suffering results in oppression. Initially, throughout ages, African women were subjected to double oppression. They in Crenshaw's view are oppressed due to their gender and skin color. Racism has denied the identity of African women, and their voice was completely ignored by the authority of the patriarch system. As a matter of fact, women were utilized as a means of satisfying men's desire (145).

African women were not only abused by their lovers or husbands, but also by their stepfathers as it is well depicted in Alice Walker's novel entitled *The Color Purple*. The Afro- American writer Alice Walker was raised in a very harsh society and was hardened by poverty, abuse and slavery. Her family's white landowner banned her and her siblings from education. Instead, they were obliged to work on a farm. Her mother fought for her children to educate. As such, Alice got the inspiration of struggling and rebellion from her mother. Accordingly, *Color Purple* is regarded by many as a mere depiction of Alice Walker's family condition as she puts forward a vivid picture about what happened to her family after World War II.

As a representative of black feminist movement, Walker concentrated on the women's abuse that was caused by their husbands and lovers; the same abuse occurred to her grandmother, who was abused and murdered by her lover. Alice created a character who has "womanist" qualities. According to Mark, walker's main aim of creating such a character is to build confidence inside each of her female readers. She

wanted to encourage African women to rebel against the authority of their husbands and the oppressors' power. Added to that, Walker as womanist targeted to illustrate the awful life condition of African-American women that was caused by racism, sexism, and class oppression (4).

Apart from African-American women, Muslim women especially, those who are living in an extremist religious country, namely Afghanistan are also subjected to double oppression. Afghan women, during the Taliban era, from 1996 to 2001, were oppressed not just by the patriarchal organization, but also by the authority of religious groups like the Talibanⁱⁱ. In terms of treating women, the authority of Taliban was comparable to that of the Puritans. Additionally, many critics considered them as a representation of American imperialism as their main concern was dominating women. In this situation, women were oppressed twice, first by the system of the society and second by men.

An Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini, who considers himself as a survival guilt intended to depict the transformation of Kabul from stable and prosperous city to one that was peaceless and miserable. Here we see a male author conveying the anguish of women; something that is unusual in Eastern literature. He is astonished by the strength of Afghan women and their determination to endure. Khaled Hosseini's desire according to Ahmed et al is to prove that "the internal forte of females' resolution is more than the potency of men when they act" (9).

Additionally, after learning about Rahimi's allegations that "in fact, Afghan women, even until the beginning of 20th century were the slaves of their father, husband and her most valued characteristic was silence and obedience" Hosseini returns to Afghanistan and his tenderness for Afghan women intensifies (287). During his journey to Afghanistan, he noticed that all women were wearing burqa, and he wondered, "what was going on underneath that". Shortly after, he came up with the idea that men "obliged their wives to wear the burqa; claiming that a women's face is her husband's business only". Those faceless women were banned from education, working and partaking in some outdoor activities. That is to say, Hosseini got the inspiration of writing *Thousand Splendid Suns* from the real events that happened to Afghan women. Moreover, the heart of the story is the portrayal of two different women. One is a poor peasant, while the other is the brilliant, well-educated daughter of a schoolteacher with high expectations for her future. Through the characterization of these two women, Hosseini depicts how women are affected by the circumstances, and he encourages them to reunite so that they might be stronger and stand up against the power of the oppressor.

2. literature review

The present study utilizes varying numerous books, articles, thesis and dissertations which revolve around the novels *Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Color Purple*. Among those, the following discussion focuses on the most significant study and the most direct ones which largely contribute in this study. About the authors' opinions and targets behind this work, details are sourced from Budi and Dewi's paper (2017). It emphasizes Celie's journey towards self-empowerment and liberation, illustrating how her personal growth and resilience serve as a testament to the strength of marginalized individuals in overcoming systemic injustices.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* still remains as one of the most popular novels. Therefore, it is not surprising that many studies are conducted about this novel. Therefore, Mark Oubre's article looks at how Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* showcases Black feminism. It examines how the book portrays the struggles and strength of Black women, focusing on how the characters fight against both racial and gender oppression. Essentially, the article shows how Walker's work reflects and supports the ideas of Black feminism. In addition, Madsen (2000) Madsen's work likely highlights the importance of literature as a tool for feminist discourse and social critique, encouraging readers to reconsider traditional interpretations through a feminist lens and promoting awareness of gender issues in literary studies.

The article by Aruna M and Nancy Thambi, titled "Exploring the Theme of Sisterhood in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Deborah Rodriguez's *The Little Coffee Shop of Kabul*," (2024) focuses on how both novels explore the theme of sisterhood. It depicts the relationships between women in challenging circumstances. It highlights how sisterhood both biological and chosen serves as a source of support and resilience for the female characters in these novels.

It is relevant to highlight the fact that most of the references on Alice Walker the *Color Purple* and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* do not particularly focus on double oppression of women, if they do not with so elaboration. This might place the study as among the new works researching into these subjects in the two literary works.

3. Double Oppression of Women in Color Purple

Alice Walker's tale of *Color Purple* revolves around the growth of a black young girl from a low and oppressed status to a larger extent of independence. Walker published *Color Purple* in 1982, shortly after the Civil War. The first period of 20th century is known as a period that is laden with oppression, suffering and economic crisis. The period that the glimpse of colonizer still existed. The statue of African -American women are defined by colonizers as "the other". Celie the protagonist of the novel in Budi and Dewi's view is undoubtedly subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Furthermore, as a young girl, she appears to be a submissive woman accepting whatever oppression she is exposed to. However, at the end of the novel, she appears to be a rebellion, opposing any oppression that she encounters by relying on her own power "self- determination".

When she was fourteen, she experienced oppression by her stepfather "You gonna to do what your mammy wouldn't" (Walker 3). At an early age, Celie was forced to take over her mother's duties to please her stepfather. Also, she was forced painfully to fulfill his desire without any objection. However, she keeps her stepfather's rape as a secret never informed to her mother. Instead, she expresses her suffering to God by writing letters. God is regarded as a source of endurance for her "I'm poor, black, I may even be ugly: but dear God, I'm here! I'm here!" (6). After her mother's death, she was further oppressed by her stepfather since he impregnated her twice and stole her children away. Afterwards, she was forced by her stepfather to marry Mr... on the grounds that "she'll make the better wife" (Walker 10).

As a married woman, the oppression grows to a point where it is impossible to escape. Her husband always refers to her as an ugly lady through which he highlights her "otherness". As a result, she has never experienced pleasure with her husband. Added to that, he refers to her as "worthless and submissive to me" (Walker 45). Thus, Celie is oppressed for two reasons, because of her race and gender, as a colonial object and as a woman living in a patriarch society. Most Importantly, Celie's relationship with her family's men members, her stepfather and husband, is revealed in this novel by physical violence as well. They believe that women are born to be beaten by their husbands and fathers. In other words, they never hesitate to beat her for no reason. Women in their view are considered to be inferior; never allowed to educate and ask for equality. Women are seen as an object that is good for being battered as mentioned in the following speech "Harpo ask his daddy why he beat me, Mr... says, because she is my wife, plus, she is stubborn. All women good for beating" (Walker 22)".

The depression she experienced as a result of her children's separation by her stepfather has resurfaced. This time, her husband further depressed her by separating her from her sister Nettie. Even Nettie's letters to Celie were received and hidden by him. As he convinces her that her sister is dead, she never asks about her sister's letters. Later on, her relationship with her husband's beloved remarks a turning point in her life. As a matter of fact, an oppressed woman is unlikely to be envious of her husband's second wife. As evidenced by numerous novels, most women consider their husbands' second wives or lovers as a turning point; the point that awakened and encouraged them. "Come on in, I want to cry. To shout. Come on in. With God help, Celie going to make you well" (Walker 42). The speech illustrates Celie's reaction to Shug becoming ill. She is asking God to provide her with power so that she could be able to assist her in her healing. However, as a result of the ongoing oppression she has been exposed to at the hands of men, she starts to establish lesbian relationships with women. Having such a kind of relationship by Madsen is interpreted as such "having a lesbian relationship demonstrates that women want to release from the domination of patriarchy because it is the source of women oppression" (226).

Afterwards, Celie's self- determination grows as she struggles to stand against her husband, referring to him as "low down dog and your dead body is just a welcome mat for me" (Walker 170). She gains enough courage that she refers to her husband as a dog. Moreover, she has the courage to speak up. She starts thinking about leaving her husband by which she could have a new life which is free from oppression. Subsequently, she comes up with a new understanding of God after getting rid of her husband, as she states in her last letter "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God". The speech indicates Celie's transformation from a submissive and dependent woman to a rebellion and independent women who is revealed to us by her rethinking of God on her own term. Added to that, her language and her voice are powerful enough to tell her own story.

"Well, talk and talk about God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I have been so busy thinking about him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it does that?) Not the color purple (where it come from?" (Walker 322).

Through this speech, Celie reveals her disregard to God. She admits to Shug that she has not writing to God in along time. She refers to God as a white male with whom she feels she shares no common ground.

Her desire to be self-reliant drives her to reject God. Then, she makes her own business and becomes financially independent "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children," (Walker 183). Ultimately, Walker's message becomes clear as she wants to encourage all women to take a lesson from her female protagonist Celie. Although, she has been oppressed for a long time, she never gives up or commit suicide. She suffers from the injustice that she faces, but eventually it aids her to quest for self-determination. Walker insists that if she does nothing, she may never find a way out of her difficult living situation.

4. Double Oppression of Women in A Thousand Splendid Suns

Khalid Hussein's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* narrates the story of Afghan women dealing with political issues and disputes, which eventually lead them to a state of oppression. He utilizes two different ladies, Mariam and Layla, for the objective of portraying the complete image of Afghan culture toward women. As a matter of fact, in Afghan culture, men are permitted by the authority to enslave or dehumanize women. They think that women cannot accomplish anything without the aid of men.

"God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can. Western Doctors and their science have proven this. That is why we acquire only one male witness but two female ones" (Hussein, 322).

The speech illustrates the mentality of Afghan government toward women. It is also evident that the government is the primary oppressor of women as they had laid the foundation of the male dominant society and the inferiority of women. They proved their misconception of women's rule by religious belief and Western Doctors. That is, the concept has been eventually established as a social norm and men are the ones who are the most likely to adopt.

Apart from cultural domination, women suffered from domestic violence. It is seen in both protagonists Mariam and Layla. As an illegitimate daughter Mariam was rejected by her father and stepmother. As a matter of fact, she was considered to be as a source of shame on their honor and dignity despite the fact of her father's sin. Even sometimes her mother addressed her as "clumsy little harami".

"What's the sense of schooling to a girl like you? ... you'll learn nothing of value in those schools. There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school... Only one skill and it's this Tahamul, Endure" (Hussein 20).

At the beginning of her life, she was marginalized by her mother as she did not allow her to educate. Mariam's mother believes that education is not important to her daughter and that what is required for her life is just Tahamul. That is to say, Mariam got the inspiration of patient and endurance from her mother. Then, after her mother's suicide, she is forced by her father to marry Rasheed, who is older than her. Through Mariam, one can recognize Hussein's message which proves the importance of education. Hussein believes that education is the only thing that motivates women to fight for equality and rights. Also, Hussein has extended his emphasis on education by stating that uneducated woman like Mariam was the ones who submits themselves to suffering and consider it as a crucial part of their life and religion.

Conversely, Layla's background is far better than Mariam. She is supported by her father to learn "I know you are still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now.... Marriage can wait, education cannot. You are a very, very bright girl truly, you are". Evidently, Khalid Hussein's views of women is presented through Layla's father. Hussein is attempting to persuade Western readers who have underestimated the abilities of Afghan women. The characterization of uneducated and oppressed women is thought to be a protest to Mohanty's view and critique toward Afghan women. Mohanty refers to Afghan women as "Third world women as illiterate" (352). Most of the Western critics believe that Afghan women are to blame for the condition that they have. They criticize them as if they do not have the desire to educate. Besides, they prefer themselves to be reliant on men.

Due to this, Hussein claims that it is Layla's consciousness of education that prompts her to demand her rights and equality. Proving that, Afghan women's ambition to learn and improve is futile because they will be oppressed by the Taliban regime. As such, Hussein's sharp criticism is directed to government, which he believes is primarily responsible for creating a male-dominated society. Additionally, he clarifies his message more by depicting men as victims of society. He suggests that men are driven by society to depress women so as to maintain their image and reputation as men living in a harsh and ignorant society where women are their primary target.

Another reason of the Afghan women being subject to oppression is when they are mistreated by their husbands. Both Layla and Mariam are forced to marry Rashid who is quite older than them. Rashid set rules for both so as to demonstrate that he is the only one who has power over all. His wives are not allowed to

disobey his commands. He plans to remarry because he wants a male heir from Mariam and she could not provide it.

"What harmful thing had she willfully done to this man to warrant his malice, his continual assaults ... Had she not looked after him when he was ill? Fed him, and his friends, cleaned up after him dutifully? Had she not given this man her youth?" (Husseini. 372).

The mentioned speech illustrates that Mariam's life gets worsen after marriage. She is a loyal house wife, who never disobeys her husband's commands. As a provider of the house, Rashid never appreciates her effort and her loyalty. Instead of providing her with love, care, and attention, he dehumanizes her. On the basis of believing that Mariam deserves to be abused verbally and physically. Furthermore, he regularly punishes her "He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it ... Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked" (Husseini 110). He forces her to chew pebble so as to abuse her physically.

Then, he succeeds to convince Laila to marry him by assuring the death of her beloved. After giving birth to a daughter, just like Mariam, Rashid's treatment turned to violence toward Laila. He suggests to send her daughter Aziza to an orphanage because of the financial conditions. "I'm ashamed," Laila croaked ... "What kind of mother abandons her own child?", this is an indication of the materialistic authority as they are ready even to sell women for their own benefit. Also, this can be regarded as another cause of oppression to Laila. As a mother, it is impossible for her to send her daughter to the orphanage. Evidently, Laila is forced by Rashed to accept the distance of her daughter.

Mariam is seen herself in Aziza's character, after a long time of suffering, obeying, suddenly Mariam awakes. She regards herself as a mother to Aziza and Laila. Ultimately, Mariam and Laila, together fight against the act of injustice that devastates their life as females despite their faithfulness to their husband and house so that the sense of hope and struggle evokes; there is no endurance any more.

Mariam and Laila after realizing that Rashid has hired someone to convince Laila about her lover's death, the anger boils and Mariam decides to sacrifice herself and to open the door of life for Laila. She kills Rashed by a shovel and "This was the first time that she was deciding the course of her own life". The speech shows Mariam's deep love and care for Laila and her children, Despite the fact that she is well aware that this murder would be compensated for, she insists on putting it out in order to prevent Rashed from killing Laila. By obeying her mother's advice, Mariam has always followed men's order, but at this point, she puts her safety aside for the sake of a lady she regards a daughter. The quote also demonstrates the transitional character of Mariam, how she suddenly awakes and is empowered to kill a man in a male dominant society. Important to be mentioned, it corresponds to Mariam's mother's prediction that "when things go wrong, it will always be a woman's fault" (Husseini 67).

As a matter of fact, the Taliban judge sentenced her to death and publicly hanged her, despite the fact that it was a self-defense. Furthermore, Khalid Hussein states that "The dreams leave Laila shakenIt is devastating. Every time, it is devastating" (Husseini 378). This line shows how it is hard and painful to Laila to bear the absence of Mariam. It also sheds light on Hussein's desire to emphasize the faithfulness of Afghan women and to correct the misconception about Afghan women that is held by Western criticism.

5. Conclusion

To sum up this study, women's oppression has become one of the most prominent topics tackled by numerous writers and critics worldwide during the early period of twentieth century. Alice Walker's *Color Purple* and Khalid Hossain's *Thousand Splined Suns* are both based on the presentation of female protagonists. The two oppressed characters, namely Mariam and Celie marched through a series of oppressive events caused by the patriarch authority and to some extent by the traditional culture. Nevertheless, Alice Walker's *Color Purple* serves as a means of raising female's awareness as she presents a character who converts from a fearful and non-fighter to a brave warrior who fights for her rights. As a result of the protest against patriarch beliefs, she reached whatever she dreamed of. On the other hands, the tale of Khalid Hussein's *Thousand Splendid Suns* draws a painful realistic image about the culture of Afghan regime, which granted men with unlimited power and dominancy over women. Hussein's aid for women to educate and be self-centered is portrayed via two unlike ladies. Finally, both novels succeed in growing the sense of sisterhood inside each of their readers. The relationships between female characters in the novels illustrate how collective action and mutual support can challenge and overcome oppressive structures. In this study, readers are compelled to think about and challenge social conventions that support prejudice and inequality as a result of these stories. The novels promote empathy and understanding while calling for social change and the overthrow of repressive structures that restrict the opportunities and rights

of women. Studying these novels essentially broadens our comprehension of the shades surrounding gender and social justice issues while providing insightful knowledge about the perseverance of women in the face of hardship and the continuous fight for equality.

6. References

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ⁱ Feminist critics defines the term of patriarchy as "the rule of the father, including the rule of older men over younger men and of fathers over daughters, as well as husbands over. wives" (Jenkins 405).

ⁱⁱ Taliban is an Islamic militant group that emerged in Afghanistan in the 1990s. They enforce strict Islamic law and have been involved in ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan.