



**STUDY ON WOMEN IN PERSPECTIVE OF MARXIST FEMINISM
AS REFLECTED IN *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS***

BY KHALEED HOSSEINI

THESIS

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**ENGLISH DEPARTEMENT
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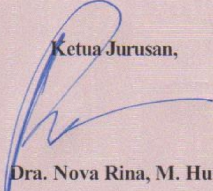
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Azharri Hilman Suhada

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Azharri Hilman Suhada

ABSTRACT

Suhada, Azharri Hilman (2016) Study on Women in Perspective of Marxist Feminism As Reflected in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaleed Hosseini.

Supervisor I : Dr. Elfiondri, S.S., M.Hum.

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Study in this thesis analyses Afghan women's lives and roles which are believed to be tied up to patriarchal rules in aspect of society and politic. The analysis aims on the images of the women which likely become determinant of society's treatments to them. Finding different images between the women themselves, and different treatments to them by society, the analysis is led to be conducted by using theory of Marxist Feminism which gives explanation of the phenomenon. Applying Eagleton and Milne's Marxist Feminism, it is seen that the women themselves are actually divided into two different social classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. Having guided by the theory and other similar ones, it is found that not all of women oppressed and bound by patriarchy. Hence, Afghan women's life and role are apparently different each other depend on social class they belong. While bourgeoisie women are immune to any oppression because of being powerful in economy, the proletariat ones are oppressed by society which is ruled by patriarchal concept.

Keywords: Afghan women, patriarchal culture, women class division, marxist feminism

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reason for choosing the topic

Speaking of feminist literature is speaking of women. Women have been becoming object of literary works since the Victorian era of English literature, 1840 – 1880 (“Women in Literature”, par.1). However, at the time women were merely projected by men writers through inappropriate characterizations in their works such as being evil or angel, Madonna or whores, witch, poor villager, or even cruel step mother (Bressler 181-191). Those were seen by women as misleading images on them. Hence, women writers felt urge to correct the misleading images, and they began to involve themselves in literature by carrying on their political movement ideology into feminist literary criticism or feminism.

While feminist political movement seeks for gender equality, feminist literary criticism is meant to establish what it means to be women from perspective of women themselves and counter the wrong images set by men at once. Feminist reasons that women do not see things in the same ways as men do because of different ideas and feelings they have. It means that feminist rejects men’s descriptions about women in literature and believes that only women themselves who know how to depict women in literary works. Therefore, it argues that women should be described by women (Selden and Widdowson 211).

However, up until now the misleading images on women in literature are onward and mostly led to depict how men or society treat women in un-appropriate way, in which women are treated as second class and unequal to men. Such inappropriate treatment from men to women is called as oppression on women. The oppression usually happens in a system of culture that is called as patriarchal culture, and it is usually derived from way of society sees women (Bressler 181).

Oppression can be defined as an action, or ideology enforcement that is directed by men to women in patriarchal culture. It is usually triggered by men's perceptions on women as weak ones, illogic, etc. (Bressler 191). In addition to it, Humm states that oppression becomes main thing to describe in feminist literary criticism as consequent of the images on women set by society (158). Hence, since their early involvement in literature till the time being, women writers concern on the issue and focus on pouring their experiences and consciousness as women in their literary works (Selden and Widowwson 203-204).

By examining some feminist's literary works, it can be seen that most of them focus on exposing gender inequality as the main cause of oppression. However, feminism's focus is not merely about oppression caused by gender inequality. Feminist literary criticism has sought for other factors and aspects which cause oppression on women alongside gender. It results in intersection of feminism with other theories. As the outcome, feminism spreads into some focuses and varieties. One of them is marxist feminism which focuses on oppression on women caused by social class inequality due to inequality in economy (Eagleton and Milne 37).

However, finding literary work on marxist feminism is not an easy thing since most of oppressions concern on either gender or class inequality only which is shortly related to Marxism or Feminism only. Yet, it is barely found in a novel entitles “*A Thousand Splendid Suns*”.

“*A Thousand Splendid Suns*” is a fictional novel which is depicted from real condition of Afghanistan. The novel has been rewarded as “New York Times Best Seller” and made into movie. Unlike other Feminist novels, “*A thousand Splendid Suns*” is written by a man, named after Khaled Hosseini. As an Afghan man, Hosseini concerns on situation of Afghanistan as he reflects life of many Afghan women in the novel who are described marginalized in social and political scope. Nevertheless, as seen in the novel, the oppression and persecution do not happen to women in general, but only to poor women which raise phenomenon of men’s different treatment.

The phenomenon can be seen from characters in the novel that represent different social class; bourgeois and proletariat. Some of characters which represent it are Mariam and her half sisters. As a woman of proletariat class, Mariam cannot have a good education and is forced to get married in her early age as teenager. She consequently inherits her mother’s social status who is servant due to her illegitimate status to her rich father, Jalil. Living with her father’s family, Mariam is seen as target of oppression because she is poor and not counted as the part of family. With her only status as illegitimate child to Jalil, Mariam does not inherit Jalil’s social status and seen powerless because of having dependence in financial. In the other

hand, her half sisters who represent bourgeois class are not forced to be married, though they are at the same age as Mariam. If Mariam is forbidden to have good education, her half sisters Saideh and Naheed, can have it without any obstacle from their family. While Mariam is compelled to follow any decision given to her, Saideh and Naheed have their freedom in making their own choices.

The different treatment is also done to Laila, a girl of bourgeois class and educated family who is really treated equal as man by her parents. Laila gets proper education and freedom in choosing her future. However, after losing her parents and becoming hopeless in war situation, Laila more likely loses her status too and is compelled marrying a man because she is terrified of dying for not having shelter and job to afford some food. Both Laila and Mariam end up marrying the same man named Rasheed. Nevertheless, after marrying Rasheed those two women are oppressed by their husband.

Men's different treatment to women in different social class can also be seen by taking comparison on how Jalil and Hakim treat their wives compared to how Rasheed does. While Jalil is more likely dictated by his wives in making action and decision, Rasheed is the one who rules his wives almost in everything. While Hakim's wife, Fariba, often argues and engages in debate with him, Mariam and Laila will be surely hit or threatened by their husband for doing so. What becomes the essence of the phenomenon is those women's social class. Jalil's wives and Fariba are representation of bourgeois class women while Mariam and Laila are proletariat ones. To make it brief, women of bourgeois social class that are rich cannot be touched by

the hand of oppression while those from proletariat who are poor, are totally oppressed.

Having a look at the phenomenon above, the different treatments to women in different social class which are reflected in the novel become something unique and interesting points to be analyzed. Generally, oppression occurs to woman in common, and it is based on the images on them which are always the same in every patriarchal culture. However the novel shows the opposite, because not every woman is oppressed, especially those who have power in economy by having means or financial independence. Most of previous feminism researches on the novel do not concern on the phenomenon, therefore the writer is urged to analyze it and bring it up in this thesis.

1.2 The Objective and Scope of the Study

The objective of this research is to describe images on women by using perspective of marxist feminism which highlights inequality of women in social class division. Particularly, the analysis will focus on images on women of the two classes based on marxist feminism concept to show up men's treatments to bourgeois women and their oppression to proletariat class women by referring to Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne's marxist feminism. Shortly, there are two specific points of this research as follows:

1. To describe images on women in Afghanistan based on marxist feminism as reflected in novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.
2. To analyze men's treatments to women based on their images in marxist feminism as reflected in the novel.

1.3 Formulation of the Problem

According to the objective of the study, at least there are two research questions which can be used as follow-up action in digging up the data and carrying out the analysis, as follows:

1. How are images of women reflected in the novel according to marxist feminism concept?
2. How are women treated by men based on their images in marxist feminism?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Bressler believes that there are few approaches in feminism (190). One of them is marxist feminism. As stated by MacKinnon, marxism and feminism are theories of power and its distribution where inequality becomes the focus. While marxism focuses on inequality because of economy, feminism in the other hand emphasizes on inequality caused by gender stereotype. The same focus of inequality makes the theories are in line somehow, and it constructs marxist feminism which seeks gender inequality because of inequality in economy (516).

According to Jullie Matthahei, marxist feminism developed in the early of seventies. Its early writings are to correct fault of marxist theory which is seen as sex-blinded by feminist (118). Matthahei believes that marxist only sees society as capitalists and workers without explanation of men's and women's position. Yet, marxist feminism clearly pinpoints it by seeing men as capitalists and women as the workers. In accordance to it, men's control to society and women are derived from economy since money or economy rules everything as in capitalism that those with more power in economy become more powerful and superior in society (118). Because capitalist can control society by controlling economy, so can men who are seen as capitalist (118).

Thus, marxist feminism believes that inequalities between men and women are started from economy since controlling economy means controlling society. Men's control toward economy is done by avoiding women to gain power or means through patriarchal stereotype that women only fit to certain jobs due to their weakness in strength and less of intelligence compared to men (Matthahei 120). Thus, it makes women only become employees and merely workers.

Being workers for women means earn less of money and cannot cover their life necessity. It makes women needs men to sustain their life because men can be more than workers and earn much money. Thus, women will have financial dependence on men which makes them weak and vulnerable to oppression. Being powerless in economy and society, women in general begin to be assumed as proletariat (Matthahei 120). Yet, "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*" somehow shows that the

condition does not reflect all of women. As representation of society, the novel proves that many women are rich and not oppressed. It reveals a fact that women can be bourgeois and they do not always have to be proletariat once women have capital or power in economy, which enables them to control society as well as men. This means that women spread into different social classes (120).

In analyzing women in different social classes, the writer uses approach of marxist feminism by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne which sees oppression on women from another perspective. Eagleton and Milne suggest that oppression on women is just a matter of economy. Men can oppress women because they have money and makes women depend on them financially (330). Therefore, once women become rich, they will have financial independence and be equal to men. Thus, women are actually divided into classes based on their ownership toward means. The rich women are known as “Bourgeois women”. Those women usually gain their status by being rich, marry to bourgeois men, or born to bourgeois family. Otherwise the poor women are known as “Proletariat women”. Those women gain the status because of less of means, born to proletariat family or having lost of their means if they once are rich (342).

In relation to oppression, Eagleton and Milne believe that only women from proletariat class experience it. Meanwhile, bourgeois women are believed to be immune towards it, because they acquire some degree of financial independence miraculously either from their career or inheritance of their rich family (331). The theory is strengthened by Bell Hooks which states that once women gain the power in

economy or financial independence, they will be likely equal to men and immune to any oppression (39). Thus, the oppressed women are only those who are from proletariat class who massively represent women in general. In addition to it, Hooks' theory is also used to identify the classes as completion of the main theory. In this case Hooks includes education factor as identifier of the class. Hooks associates bourgeois women as well educated ones since he reckons that high level of education is accessible with money as an attribute to strengthen the bourgeois domination in many aspects of society (40). In the other hand, Hooks identifies that most of proletariat women are uneducated ones. The condition makes the women powerless either in economy or politic, and end up in oppression (40). As a result, the social class division between women somehow has raised men's different treatment to them, because men can only oppress those who are inferior to them but not the equal ones.

1.5 Method of the Research

The research is done by doing qualitative method in which the data is analyzed by using words instead of numbers. The writer himself is the instrument of the research who reads the literary work as the object of the research. As library research, the first step in doing the research is to broaden writer's knowledge and understanding on marxist feminism and women class division based on Eagleton and Milne. Writer also reads some sources which concern on Afghanistan as the setting of the novel to understand the society's condition as factor which causes oppression on women. Having his knowledge broaden, the writer focuses on the object of the

research which is the novel “*A Thousands Splendid Suns*” by doing close reading technique.

As stated by Robert, problems in a literary work can be found by digging them up through characters from their speech; dialogues between characters, other characters’ statement to a character, actions of characters, and also setting. Hence, the close reading technique is done to the novel by referring to Robert in corridor concept of marxist feminism which focuses on images on women of different social class. To find the data, the novel is read seriously several times by giving attention on its intrinsic elements. Then, the next is to find men’s treatments to women by referring to the images of women in different social class. Shortly, the writer lists the images on bourgeois class women as well as proletariat class ones in few aspects. Then, it will lead the writer to find men’s treatments to the different class of women as well.