



**An Ecocritical Analysis of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns***

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**ABSTRACT:**

This study is an ecofeminist analysis of Khalid Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* focusing on how the novelist utilizes various techniques to foreground the oppression of women and Nature. The novelist also emphasizes Nature to blur dialectical pairs. Cartesian dualism is extended to the culture/nature dichotomy. Symbiotic relationships of Nature gather strength as they are foregrounded by Hosseini through relations of metaphor exhibiting underlying principles of kinship. Eco-feminism, which combines ecology and the idea of feminism, opposes anthropocentrism and androcentrism as well as criticizes the values of patriarchy. Hosseini also focuses on the female subaltern characters which are marginalized by culture and male dominated society. This paper uses the theory of eco-feminism to reveal the control and oppression on women and the devastation of Nature in the patriarchal society. It tries to demonstrate the ecological and feminist consciousness in the novel and to show the author's rumination on the relationship among Nature, men and women. The survival instinct of the female characters is allocated through the language of ecology and emblemizes the dismantling of boundaries in the culture/nature dialectical pair.

**Keywords:** Eco-feminism, anthropocentrism and androcentrism, patriarchy, ecological and feminist consciousness.

## INTRODUCTION:

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American writer. He was born on March 4, 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan, to a diplomat father. Hosseini spent some time living in Iran and France and later became an American citizen. Hosseini's first novel *The Kite Runner* was published in 2003 and was an instant commercial success. The novel also won Exclusive Books Boeke Prize in 2004. His second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in 2007. The novel won several awards like California Book Award Silver Medal for fiction in 2007, British Book Award in 2008, Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Adult fiction in 2008. The setting of both the novels is his hometown, Afghanistan. His third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed* was published in 2013 which won Goodreads Choice Award for fiction in the same year. Recently, he has published *The Sea Prayer* (2018) which focuses on the plight of refugees.

Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* portrays men-women relationships, the societal cultural institutions, and the history of Afghanistan. It narrates the story of two women, Mariam and Laila in Afghan society which stands with conventional norms and does not give space to its females. Throughout the story, global and regional powers struggle to bring chaos and destruction to both women's lives, and to the country of Afghanistan. In his fictional writings, Hosseini has shown concern for ecological issues. Through these issues, he is trying to educate people about the importance of environmental preservation. He mostly writes about the history of Afghanistan which is replete with many wars. Through the description of these wars, he is actually showing the ecological destruction that took place in Afghanistan. Besides, he also focuses on the beauty of natural ecology of Afghanistan prior to these wars that led to environmental pollution and degradation. The period before the Soviets ruled Afghanistan was known as the golden era of the country.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore Khalid Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as an ecofeminist reading with a special focus on how the novelist utilizes various techniques reflecting the modes of subjugation for women and Nature as well as their

revolt. Another strategy adopted by the novelist is to address Nature and even the Earth at various instances with a view to communicate the anguish to the readers and dismantle dichotomies. The survival instinct of female characters against patriarchy is outlined in the language of ecology, in a stance that emblemizes the dismantling of boundaries in the culture/nature dialectical pair. The novel depicts the beauty of Afganistan in the beginning where man is at peace with Nature but as the story proceeds Afganistan is lurched into war leading to the devastation of Nature and marginalization of women. Nature and women are exploited to the limit as a consequence of war.

In a patriarchal set up, a woman is always oppressed. She is not even given the freedom of her own choice and opinions are just thrust upon her. The author has brought to the forefront the sufferings of two Afghan women - Mariam and Laila. The primary theme in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the rights of women, especially under the Taliban. Mariam and Laila grow up under regimes that are not oppressive. Although Mariam's father's family pushes her into marriage with Rasheed, it is ultimately her choice to agree to marry him. Under the Soviet regime, Laila is able to go to school, and her father wants her to hold off on marriage until she has finished her education. With the arrival of the Taliban, all of that is taken away. Women are expected to wear burqas, be escorted by male family members, and to be obedient to the rules and regulations of the Taliban regime. Laila and Mariam suffer at the hands of Rasheed because he is given all of the power over the women and children, according to the law. The unfair treatment of women is horrific and brutal, and epitomized with Mariam's execution in the stadium.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The term "Ecocriticism" was coined by William Rueckett in 1978 in an essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" where he writes that it involves "application of Ecology and Ecological concepts to the study of literature" (107). His

definition encompasses all possible relations between literature and the physical world. Ecology is a term derived from German 'Oecologie' meaning, "the branch of biology that deals with the relationship between living organisms and their environment" (Johnson 193). The etymology of the word 'Ecology' (oikos + logos) describes it as the knowledge of the household science. Therefore ecology is not a binary relationship between an organism and the environment but is inclusive of the interrelationships among the environment, society and the individual. Thus an analysis of a text in terms of these three components is termed as Ecocriticism. It is derived from Greek word 'oikos' and 'kritis.' Oikos means household and Kritis means judge. The theory made a great progress with the publication of two landmark books in 1996, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*. Cheryll Glotfelty, the first American Professor of Literature and environment in his book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) defines the term 'Ecocriticism' as: Simply put, Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii) In the same book, Glotfelty writes that human beings are responsible for the environmental problems. She also talks about the wide scope of this critical approach. Ecocriticism broadens its scope to other genres besides Nature writing as long as the works examine ecological awareness. Glotfelty writes, "Nature per se is not the only focus of eco-critical studies of representation. Other topics include the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, Indians, technology, garbage, and the body" (xiii). In 1992, Glotfelty was also the co-founder of ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) which has its own journal named ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment) started in 1993. Ecocriticism as a critical approach began in USA in the late 1980s and in UK as Green Studies in the early 1990s. Ecocritics hold the view that human beings are largely

responsible for the destruction of Nature. So, the main aim of ecocritics is to preserve and protect Nature from any kind of disaster. Concerns pertaining to ecofeminism are underscored in the novel, as the subjugation of women and the degradation of Nature function on a parallel plane. Ecofeminism, as a theory, has been widely advanced as one which argues that “the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture” (Salleh, 1988, p. 138). On a broader scale, the theory emphasizes the importance of interrelationships between humans and the natural environment (animals, plants, and the earth), and is now viewed in a larger perspective as a movement working against the interconnected oppressions of gender, race, class, and Nature. In “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” Karen J. Warren (1990) ascertains that any feminism, environmentalism, or environmental philosophy that fails to recognize important women–Nature connections is simply inadequate.

In Warren’s texts ‘Nature’ might describe either the planet Earth and all of its components, or just the nonhuman elements of the planet Earth – nonhuman animals, plants, the land, forests, rivers, species, communities, ecosystems, the biosphere, etc. In this case Warren often makes use of ‘nonhuman nature’ instead of just ‘Nature’. Warren’s natural world is conceived as a community that includes humans as its members – humans are animals –, and where nonhuman Nature is seen as “independent, different, perhaps even indifferent to humans” (Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, p. 105), as an active subject that shapes the human world, and as deserving moral consideration.

According to Deep Ecology, Ecosystem precedes all living beings including humans. Deep Ecologists seek ways to create a form of consciousness which prioritizes the Ecosystem rather than all animate beings including humans. Deep Ecology maintains this by rising up against anthropocentric thought and opposes all arguments that regard the Nature as some form of human possession. Social Ecologists hold the view that environmental issues cannot be separated and are thus interconnected with social matters. Due to the fact that human action is mainly controlled by social relations and cultural factors, environmental issues need to be analyzed from a socio-cultural perspective. The founder of Social Ecology was the

American theorist and activist Murray Bookchin. Deep Ecology condemned anthropocentrism i.e., human-centeredness, as the major element that created an obstacle in the relationship between humans and the environment. Social Ecology went further to blame hierarchy as the basic factor which led forth to irrelevance and inconsistency on the same grounds. On the other hand, ecofeminism went a step further and referred to patriarchy as the major source of problems within the same context (Gaard, 2010: 17). Greta Gaard describes patriarchy as: the male-dominated system of social relations and values, and should be distinguished from "hierarchy," which refers to relationships of command and obedience enforced by social structures and institutions. [...] In Western Patriarchal culture, "masculine" constructs and values have been internalized in our minds, embodied in our institutions, and played out in power-based social relations both in our daily lives and upon the world stage. It is this "masculine" undercurrent, not human-centeredness, which is behind the irrational ideas and behavior displayed on the evening news. Gaard criticizes the very fact that humans have taken for granted all masculine values and acknowledged them as basic norms. Henceforth, in a patriarchal society, all values and principles are established upon male-centered perspectives. These perspectives are not only taken for granted as the absolute truth, but are also shaping our societies and individuals in a way that degrades women and positions them in an inferior position. Therefore, ecofeminism takes a firm stand against patriarchy and androcentrism or male-centeredness. Androcentrism is the notion that male perceptions are prioritized and valued over all other point of views. Moreover, Gaard defines ecofeminism as: a value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is "an awareness" that begins with the realization that the exploitation of Nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures or, in Ariel Salleh's words, that there is a "parallel in men's thinking between their 'right' to exploit Nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other. (2010: 18) Gaard thus provides the connection between the oppression of Nature with the oppression of women. Gaard thereby associates

androcentrism with the destruction of Nature and defends that it is the androcentric thought which is primarily responsible for the oppression and degradation of women. Men who believe they own and have all the right over Nature generally share the same intention when it comes to women.

### **A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS:**

The novel begins with the depiction of the life of little Mariam and her mother, Nana in the secluded area outside Herat. Mariam is just five years old when she is made to encounter the word 'harami' (meaning bastard) by her mother Nana. Mariam as a kid suffers for the sin she didn't even know about. Nana was a housekeeper for a rich businessman named Jalil in Herat. Jalil impregnates Nana and when Jalil's family comes to know about this, they demand him to throw her out. Even Nana's own father disowns her. She is made to leave the town and forced to live in a small Kolba, cut off from the rest of the city. Mariam was brought up in the natural surrounding with almost no interaction with society. Till the age of fifteen she would listen with enchantment to the stories of Herat from her father Jalil, who would visit her only on Thursdays. It seemed impossible for her to walk to Herat, see the famous minarets up close, and pick fruit from Herat's orchards or stroll in its fields of wheat. Nana clarifies that their existence is similar to weeds for Jalil and his wives. She was a mugwort or a weed that is ripped out and tossed aside. Mariam is deprived of a normal life, her wish of going to the school is considered unimportant due to her social status. Mariam's connection with Nature is very strong as in the novel we have come across many instances where Mariam compares human experiences with natural objects. One such example is the kissing of Mullah Faizullah's hands. "Mariam kissed Mullah Faizullah's hand-which felt like kissing a set of twigs covered with a thin layer of skin" (Hosseni, p.17).

Despite her orientation in a strong patriarchal community, at the age of 15 in 1974, Mariam is hopeful that her father and his legitimate family will accept her and let her live with them. Defying her mother's advice, she boldly decides to visit her father alone. Hosseni

symbolically describes this as crossing the stream which is equivalent to crossing the limits of her safe and secure abode. “She rolled up the legs of her trousers to the knees, crossed the stream, and for the first time in her life, headed down the hill for Herat (Hosseini, p.33). However, her rebellion fails as her father refuses to see her and her mother, terrified that her daughter has deserted her, commits suicide. Mariam is all alone and helpless at a young age and in an analogous way she is also forced by her father to marry Rasheed, who is 30 years older. Mariam appears to be “a silent woman” who chooses not to rebel against oppression. This silence can be analyzed in several ways. Spivak noted that “the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” (104). Therefore, subjugated women’s sufferings are never noticed. Mohanty points out that western feminists assert that subaltern Third World women like Mariam cannot be heard because society is not ready to listen to them. Through the use of similes, Hosseini illustrates Mariam's mood about her nuptials. Mariam while describing her husband, compares his voice to dry leaves and the colour of his nails to the yellow-brown inside of a rotting apple which is an attempt to connect him to things she already understood, like the natural world. Through these comparisons she not only tries to make sense of her husband by comparing him to things she knows well, but also signifies that her first impressions of him are unappealing. In contrast, she notes her own appealing appearance during the ceremony. While able to note her flaws — patchy dry skin, for instance — she's also able to see something of interest there. Mariam's view of herself compared with her view of her husband suggests that even though her family has devalued her and forced her into a loveless marriage, she still has a level of self-worth. Hosseini develops Rasheed's character and introduces a symbol through the gift of the burqa, both elements building on the theme of gender roles. Rasheed's traditionalism emerges more fully through his treatment of and expectations from Mariam as his wife. Thus, the burqa not only becomes more than a sign of religious belief, but also a symbol of Rasheed's will and control over Mariam. In her acceptance of the burqa, Mariam reveals her incapability to stand up against her authoritative



husband. She has no choice but to accept Rasheed's strict ideals and transform her lifestyle accordingly.

Just as Mariam was a teenage girl without choices, so is Laila after the death of her parents. Like Mariam was at the time, Laila is too young to support herself financially, and her gender makes her vulnerable in violence-ravaged Kabul. In contrast, Laila's father ensured that his daughter would have the education to prevent such circumstances from happening — unlike Jalil, who made no effort to help his daughter in her time of need. However, the violence erupting throughout the nation makes Hakim's dream for Laila unattainable. Thus, through this repetition of circumstances, Hosseini drives home the point that cultural notions of gender-appropriate behavior are particularly harmful and limiting to women. Decades have passed since Mariam was a child-bride, yet Laila is stuck in the same circumstances. Furthermore, the imbalance of power between the sexes is widely perceived as proper in Kabul. The culture of Afghanistan dictates that Rasheed cannot help Laila escape Kabul or gain employment, but he can marry her to "help" her. — Once again, the war compounds the limitations on women. In a time of peace, Laila might have been able to seek out a different life. However, due to the violence, such options are extremely unsafe. Marrying Rasheed becomes a viable, albeit tragic, option.

Symbiotic relationships are underscored by Hosseini, thereby revealing underlying principles of kinship. Ecofeminist practice is necessarily antihierarchical. It preaches that life on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy. There is no natural hierarchy; human hierarchy is projected on to Nature and then used to justify social domination (King quoted in Vakoch, 2011). Thus, the marriage or the so called the symbiosis between Rasheed and Mariam, is possibly the central conflict in this story, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. There are significant changes to Mariam and Rasheed's relationship and characters, and Hosseini uses political unrest and the birth of Fariba's daughter, Laila, to foreshadow changes in Mariam and Rasheed's lives. Having fast-forwarded four years, it's clear that the problems Mariam and

Rasheed experienced during their first miscarriage have only been amplified by six more losses. Mariam has become even more submissive and fearful of Rasheed, whose temper and displeasure dominate their lives. Whereas once Rasheed tolerated Mariam's questions about Kabul and other events, now he hides his own ignorance behind his impatience with her questions regarding communism. His bitterness reaches a new height when he forces Mariam to chew pebbles as a punishment for the rice that wasn't cooked properly. As a child, pebbles signified the siblings Mariam longed for, but now they have become a symbol for all she's lost — most particularly her dream of starting a family with Rasheed. She knows Rasheed considers her a burden, and Mariam is constantly anxious and self-conscious, wanting to do her best to please him, but knowing all of her attempts will fall short. Having no alternatives, she's caught in a cycle of violence and forced to live in a constant state of fear.

It is obvious that social inequality is being 'naturalized', that is, literally disguised as Nature, and viewed as a situation which is 'God-given' and inescapable, when actually it is the product of a specific politics and power structure. The outbreak of civil war in Afghanistan heavily affected both women and Nature. In war-torn Kabul, war acts as yet another limiting factor on women's lives. In addition to domestic and religious expectations, war keeps women at home. Heavy shelling from either side of the Kabul River. Streets littered with bodies, glass and crumpled chunks of metal. Looting, murder, rape of women, killing of raped women in the name of honour and women committing suicide out of fear of being raped.

“In Kabul, particularly in western Kabul, fires raged, and black palls of smoke mushroomed over snow-clad buildings. Embassies closed down. Schools collapsed. In hospital waiting rooms, Rasheed said, the wounded were bleeding to death. In operating rooms, limbs were being amputated without anesthesia”  
(Hossen, p. 244)

Hosseni focuses on the contrast when he depicts the liberal and self-reliant life of women before and after the Taliban regime. Mariam is bewitched to see the confident women on the chicken street in Kabul.

“These women were- what was the word Rasheed had used? - “modern.” Yes, modern Afghan women married to modern Afghan men who did not mind their wives walked among strangers with makeup on their faces and nothing on their heads...” (Hosseni, p. 80).

When the Taliban came to power in 1996, they instituted a system of gender apartheid which put women in a state of constant house arrest unless accompanied by a male relative. Women's progress in education and employment was crushed with the harsh laws imposed by the Taliban. Women were no longer in control of their life's decisions as they were forced to marry young, deprived of the right to education, they were prohibited to see a male doctor and were violently bashed up by the police for any misconduct. Rasheed is the most encouraged as the Taliban's arrival not only reinforces his beliefs regarding the place of women, but it will restore to him the freedom he once enjoyed. Both Mariam and Laila's hopefulness is tempered by their pasts. For all of Mariam's adult life, she has been in Rasheed's control. Except for being thankful that Laila and her daughter Aziza are with her she has no more illusions that life can improve or change from what it is. Laila, however, having been educated and taught that both she and her independence matter, is less able to accept the Taliban. Laila is shocked to know that anyone would obey their rules. The brutality Laila and Mariam experience when they fail to escape and are sent back to Rasheed is indicative of the violent, sexist culture in which they live. Rasheed's violence reveals his attitude toward the women: they are his property, to treat as well or as poorly as he wishes. By locking both of them up and depriving them of food, water, and sunlight, he demonstrates his complete control over their fates. His power over them, coupled with the anti-women laws of Kabul, make it impossible for the women to escape. There is no one they can trust but each other. Submission to these rules is their only means of survival.

Mutedness results from the lack of power and might lead to being overlooked, muffled, and invisible. As gender communication scholar Cheri Kramarae states, social interaction and communication create the current language structure. Because the latter was mainly built by men, men have an advantage over women. Consequently, women cannot express their thoughts through their own words because their language use is limited by the rules of a man's language. Kramarae states:

"The language of a particular culture does not serve all its speakers equally, for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation. Women (as well as members of other non-dominant groups) are not as free or as able as men are to say what they wish, because the words and the norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men."

As Cowan points out, "'muteness' does not refer to the absence of voice but to a kind of distortion where subordinate voices...are allowed to speak but only in the confines of the dominant communication system. Thus, the muting process presupposes a collective understanding of who is in power and who is not. The discrepancies in power result in the "oppressor" and "the oppressed". Kramarae points out that muted group as "the oppressed" are people who don't have a "public recognized vocabulary" to express their experience. Their failure to articulate their ideas lead to their doubt about "the validity of their experience" and "the legitimacy of their feelings". Kramarae also addresses that gender, race, and class hierarchies, where muted groups, are supported by our "political, educational, religious, legal, and media systems". Due to the lack of power, muted groups are usually at the margin of the society which is very well depicted in the novel. When Mariam suffers a miscarriage. Rasheed and Mariam return to the doctor, who cannot find a reason for the miscarriage, which leaves the grieving couple without answers. Mariam and Rasheed return home and Mariam lies down on the couch and watches the snow fall. She remembers that Nana once called snow the sighs of upset women.

“She remembered Nana saying once that each snowflake was a sigh heaved by an aggrieved woman somewhere in the world. That all the sighs drifted up to the sky, gathered into clouds, then broke into tiny pieces that fell silently on people below”  
(Hosseni, p.97)

The survival instinct of other female characters against patriarchy is outlined through the medium of Ecology that serves to efface boundaries in the culture/nature dichotomy. Gruen places dichotomies against the background of feminist and animal liberation theories and suggests that these traditional views promote and perpetuate unnecessary and unsustainable dichotomies (between Nature and culture, between reason and emotion). She underscores that ecofeminist theory can provide an alternative, inclusive framework for liberation struggles. (Gruen, 1993, p. 7), from a linear, fragmented, and detached mind-set to a more direct, holistic appreciation of subjective knowing (Gruen, 1993, p. 61). Mariam’s mother Nana’s description of their existence as weeds highlights their survival in drastic conditions. “To Jalil and his wives, I was a pokeroot. A mugwort. You too. And you weren’t even born yet” (Hosseni, p.8). However, unlike a weed, she has to be replanted and given food and water on account of Mariam. Hosseini establishes a symbol of change through Laila's dream. In the dream, she and Tariq are sitting on a beach and she tells him to listen to the singing sand. The sand sings both low and high notes and by describing these notes as "groaning" and "mewling," Hosseini suggests the sand, in its shifting, sings of the problems that lie ahead for Laila and Tariq. The fact that Laila remembers the sand right before a rocket hits her house is proof of this. Through this symbol, the reader is reminded of the transitory nature of life — no matter what Laila and Tariq plan for each other, and for their families, they cannot control all aspects of their fates. When Laila hears the news that a stranger brought about Tariq’s death, she could hardly move but she could connect to Nature for solace.

“She sat on the chair instead, hands limp in her lap, eyes staring at nothing, and let her mind fly. She let it fly on until it found the place, the good and safe place, where the barley fields were green, where the water ran clear and the cottonwood seeds danced by the thousands in the air; where Babi was reading a book beneath an acacia and Tariq was napping with his hands laced across his chest, and where she could dip her feet in the stream and dream good dreams beneath the watchful gaze of gods of ancient, sun-bleached rock” (Hosseni, p. 223)

Essentialism, which is associated with early ecofeminism, “links women with a biological capacity to give birth, and associates this capacity with a greater concern with ecology”, arguing for an innate connection between womanhood and Nature, and Nature’s salvation. (Hester 37). Men, in contrast, are positioned by eco-feminists as an opposing force to women, with the inborn potential to destroy Nature. Nana is left all alone to give birth to Mariam, she lay all alone on the Kolba’s floor with a knife by her side. There was nobody to even give her water to drink and after two days of severe pain Mariam was born. Laila while giving birth to Zalmi has to undergo caesarian section without anesthesia. When the doctor told her about the breech position of the baby and informed about the lack of medicines, Laila with the fear of losing the baby told, “ Then cut me open,” (Hosseni, p.311). In the novel, when Rasheed comes to know that Laila met Tariq he turns violent and whips Laila with his belt. Mariam claws at Rasheed, trying to stop him from hurting Laila. He drops the belt and lunges at her. Laila smashes a vase over Rasheed's head and he turns back to her, pressing her to the floor with his hands wrapped around her throat. Realizing Rasheed has murder in mind, Mariam runs out to the toolshed, grabs a shovel, and returns to whack Rasheed over the head with it. Stunned, Rasheed looks up at Mariam, an evil smirk forming on his face. Mariam knows she has no choice but to kill him. It shows the culmination of all her life's experiences: the pain and sorrow Rasheed has caused her, as well as the joy and love she feels with Laila, force her to kill Rasheed. Throughout her marriage, Mariam has accepted what fate has brought her, asking nothing of Rasheed or anyone. For the first time, Mariam sees her worth

and believes that she's never deserved the anguish she's had to endure. Her second and equally powerful motivation is saving Laila's life. Mariam realizes after her first swing at Rasheed that if she does not kill him, he will kill them both. While Mariam is ready to die, she's not ready to lose Laila. Through her decision to kill Rasheed, Mariam values her role as a mother above all else; like any mother, she's willing to do whatever it takes to protect Laila. All of these actions show that Mariam is placing Laila and her children above concern for her own livelihood. Laila's acceptance of Mariam's sacrifice also demonstrates her adherence to motherly ideals and her willingness to put her children ahead of her own concerns. Once Laila understands that Mariam intends to turn herself in, Laila becomes distraught. She urges Mariam to reconsider, but Mariam instructs her to "think like a mother." At this point, Laila realizes that in order to be a good mother to her children, she must go along with Mariam's plan — otherwise she risks putting them all in danger. By depicting the many sacrifices these women make for their children, Hosseini suggests that good mothers have the necessary qualities for healing — not just for healing of familial relationships, but these qualities can heal Afghani society, as a whole.

The use of gender as a category of analysis enables us to establish how environmental destruction and environmental issues can affect women and men differently, as well as to discriminate between women's and men's environmental impact. In the novel, drought adds to the difficulties faced by women. Rasheed, unable to feed his family asks Laila to push Aziza into beggary as he considers a girl child to be a burden. The initial decision to send Aziza to the orphanage demonstrates how a mother must make painful decisions in order to assure the survival of her children. Laila's need to focus on Aziza's well-being is shown when she stresses to Aziza that there will be food at the "school" she's attending. Zaman, the director of the orphanage also assures Aziza that she's not abandoning her, but that Laila's been forced into an impossible situation where she can do nothing to support her daughter except give her away. Through these moments, Hosseini shows how dramatically the Taliban's presence has affected Kabul as it has made it impossible for mothers to provide for

their children. Hosseini shows that mothers are often willing to suffer for their children. Once Rasheed stops escorting Laila to the orphanage, she has to suffer violent attacks and merciless bashing from the Taliban for going alone. As Hosseini has shown throughout the novel, mothers are often forced into difficult relationships with their children in order to do what they think is best. Recall that Nana tried to stifle Mariam's dreams because she didn't want her to face later disappointment and that Fariba could only care for Laila at a distance. Now Mariam and Laila face similar difficulties in their roles as caretakers. Mariam finds new strength to endure Rasheed in her efforts to protect and provide for Laila, Aziza, and Zalmai. Meanwhile, Laila must actively give away her daughter in order to make sure she's fed and clothed.

Both Mariam and Laila revolt against the oppressive circumstances as they both had been pushed beyond their limits of tolerance. Hosseini in the novel through the condition of drought in Kabul relates the revolt of Nature against its exploitation.

“It was the drought, started in 1998, in its second year now, that was wreaking havoc everywhere. It hardly snowed that past winter and didn't rain at all that spring...The Kabul River, without its yearly spring floods, had turned bone-dry. It was a public toilet now, nothing in it but human waste and rubble” (Hosseini, p.313).

Hosseini ends the novel with a notion of hope. The end of the war era and the beginning of recovery period to heal the scars of sufferings in humans and Nature. When Laila returns back to Kabul from Pakistan, she finds this healing touch of the Nature. Hosseini quotes: “The drought has ended. It snowed at last this past winter, knee-deep, and now it has been raining for days. The Kabul River is flowing once again. Its spring floods have washed away Titanic City” (Hosseini, p.436). She sees people planting saplings, painting old houses, building new houses and there are flowers potted in the empty shells. The orphanage is renovated by Tariq



and the caretaker, Zaman and Laila take the role of a teacher. Planted saplings are a symbol of hope and Nature's fertility. The orphanage symbolizes the changes going on in Kabul as a whole. From the freshly planted apple trees to the new classroom, the orphanage has become a true sanctuary for children who have lost their parents due to war. If the orphanage can take care of society's most vulnerable members, there's hope that Afghani society will truly recover and thrive. When Laila was a child, she was taught that education was the key to a good life and that she had a responsibility to give back to society in return for receiving that education. Laila fulfills both these conditions through her new career. By teaching both girls and boys in the orphanage, she takes the first step in showing them a different way of life, in which equality among genders is the norm, not the exception. She thus becomes a "mother" to all of the children she works with, serving as a compassionate guide, educating their minds as well as their spirits. Finally, Laila's pregnancy is the ultimate sign of hope. She has seen so much pain and suffering, but sees so many positive changes that she's willing to bring another life into the world. Her willingness to become a mother several times over — first for Aziza and Zalmai, then for the orphanage children, and now for a new child — reiterates Hosseini's theme regarding the power of motherhood and how it's essential to mending the social fabric of Afghanistan. By upholding the values of motherhood — self-sacrifice, compassion, and dedication to others — Laila's able to be a positive influence on all those around her, and serve as a model for how Afghanistan could embrace a new phase of its history.

## **CONCLUSION:**

This paper tries to show that environmental destruction and the dissolution of human relationships go hand in hand- The foregrounding of the personal despair of the marginalized women characters like Mariam, Laila, Nana and the suppression of natural environment by using war as a tactic. The notion of violence has been key in exploring patriarchal oppressions of both women and Nature, where violence exposes the patriarchal instrumentalist mindset regarding both. Hosseini also depicts the plight of the people in the war prone country the

impact war has on their lives with a special focus on women and Nature. Thus we can conclude that women and Nature share the same traits which include alienation, futility, inferiority, restriction, dependency and subordination. Ecocriticism is, in this sense, a powerful tool that can be used in academia to raise critical awareness of the crisis and activate agencies for restoring the health of the environment.

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