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## The Agony and Resilience of Afghan women in Yasmina Khedra's *The Swallows of Kabul* and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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### Abstract

This article attempts to compare Yasmina Khedra's, *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) with Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). To do so, both Postcolonial Feminism and Trauma theory have been applied in order to explore the female protagonists' oppression by their male counterparts and the traumatic experiences they endure, starting with loss and violence, to total marginalization and invisibility. This trauma appears on the female characters under different shapes such as nightmares and flashbacks. Ultimately, it concludes that both Yasmina Khedra and Khaled Hosseini aim at denouncing the violence endured by the Afghan women under the Taliban regime which uses religion as a mean to oppress them, and portraying the resilience of women despite all odds. Through a thematic study of the two novels, this article will shed light on the brutality of the environment under which the Afghan women live in a male-dominant society, supported by a strong political fanaticism. That is, women suffer twice: first because they live under the weight of traditional Afghan society, and second because they live in the midst of a strong radical Islamic system. Women become invisible beings , excluded from any social activity and facing all sorts of injustice.

**Key words:** Postcolonial Feminism, Trauma theory, patriarchy, Afghan women, Taliban regime, oppression, resilience.

### ملخص

يحاول هذا المقال مقارنة كتابي "طيور الكابل" للكاتب ياسمينه خضراء (2002) و"ألف شمس رائعة" للكاتب خالد حسيني (2007). ولذلك، تم تطبيق نظرية النسوية الاستعمارية ونظرية الصدمة لاستكشاف قمع البطلات النسائيات من قبل نظرائهن الذكور والتجارب الصادمة التي يعانينها، بدءًا من الخسارة والعنف، حتى الهامشية والاختفاء الكلي. تظهر هذه الصدمة على الشخصيات النسائية تحت أشكال مختلفة مثل الكوابيس والذكريات المؤلمة. وفي النهاية، يستنتج المقال أن ياسمينه خضراء وخالد حسيني يهدفان إلى إدانة العنف الذي تتعرض له النساء الأفغانيات تحت نظام طالبان الذي يستخدم الدين كوسيلة لقمعهن، وتصوير صمود النساء رغم كل الصعاب. من خلال دراسة موضوعية للروايتين، سيسلط هذا المقال الضوء على وحشية البيئة التي تعيش فيها النساء الأفغانيات في مجتمع يهيمن عليه الذكور، بدعم

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من تعصب سياسي قوي. وهكذا، تعاني النساء مرتين: أولاً لأنهن يعيشن تحت وطأة المجتمع الأفغاني التقليدي، وثانياً لأنهن يعيشن في وسط نظام إسلامي تطرفي قوي. يصبح النساء كائنات غير مرئية، مستبعدات من أي نشاط اجتماعي ومواجهات لجميع أنواع الظلم.

الكلمات الرئيسية: النسوية الاستعمارية، نظرية الصدمة، الأنظمة الأبوية، النساء الأفغانيات، نظام طالبان، القمع، الصمود.

## Introduction

Afghanistan has long been embroiled in a tumultuous history marked by incessant conflicts between various societal factions and foreign powers vying for control. The nation's trajectory has been marred by a relentless cycle of warfare, tracing back to the Soviet Union's invasion in 1978, an event that spanned a grueling decade and instigated numerous clashes with anti-communist Muslim guerrillas, known as the Mujahideen. Following the signing of the Geneva peace treaty in 1988, which prompted the withdrawal of Soviet forces, Afghanistan plunged into a devastating civil war as different factions of the Mujahideen fought to claim governance over the country. The city of Kabul, serving as the nation's capital, bore the brunt of relentless bombings, soon followed by other urban centers. This period witnessed the Afghan people enduring unimaginable violence and hardships. Amidst widespread killings, women were subjected to rape and slaughter, children perished in their pursuit of education, homes were reduced to rubble, and an overwhelming sense of horror and chaos permeated throughout the land. In 1996, the Taliban seized absolute control, imposing their draconian rule upon the people of Afghanistan.

Women in Afghanistan endure immense suffering under the oppressive regime of the Taliban. They are subjected to verbal abuse, physical violence, and even murder at the hands of men for the most trivial reasons. In a report published by Physicians for Human Rights titled "The Taliban's War on Women: A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan" (1998), the immediate restrictions imposed on women by the Taliban forces are extensively documented. The report highlights the severe limitations imposed on women's rights, their access to education, healthcare, and their ability to move freely within society. It underscores the alarming extent to which Afghan women's lives were curtailed and controlled under the Taliban regime. It is within this context of systemic oppression and gender-based violence that the female characters in *The Swallows of Kabul* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* navigate their lives. Their stories shed light on the resilience and indomitable spirit of Afghan women, even in the face of unimaginable adversity. "Since mid-1994, the status of women shifted dramatically in areas under Taliban control. Soon after the Taliban took control of Kabul in September 1996, the Supreme Council issued edicts forbidding women to work outside the home, attend school, or to leave their homes unless accompanied by a mahram (husband, father, brother, or son). In public, women must be covered from head to toe in a "burqa," with only a mesh opening to see and breathe through. They are not permitted to wear white (the color of the Taliban flag) socks or white shoes, or shoes that make noise as they walk. Houses and buildings in public view must have their windows painted over if females are present. They are not permitted to be examined by a male health worker in the absence of a male

chaperone. And they are largely prohibited from working, resulting in the brutal impoverishment of their families, especially the enormous number of families who have lost a male breadwinner as a casualty of war. Also, the Taliban severely limited women's access to health care and closed public bath houses for women". (30)

In fact, when the Taliban took power in 1996, they imposed their political regime based on strict shari'aa laws on people in general and women in particular.

"Attention women:

You will stay inside your homes at all times. It is not proper for women to wander aimlessly about streets. If you go outside, you must be accompanied by a mahram, a male relative. If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home.

You will not, under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten.

Cosmetics are forbidden.

Jewellery is forbidden.

You will not wear charming clothes.

You will not speak unless spoken to.

You will not make eye contact with men.

You will not laugh in public. If you do, you will be beaten.

You will not paint your nails. If you do you will lose a finger.

Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately.

Women are forbidden from working.

If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death.

Listen. Listen well. Obey. Allah-u-Akbar". (Hosseini, 271)

In his novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini describes the strict rules imposed on women and the harsh consequences they face if they do not abide by the rules. Therefore, under the Taliban regime women become oppressed, losing their rights to speak, to work, to go out by themselves, and to protest against their new fate. Both Yasmina Khadra's, *The Swallows of Kabul* and Khaled Hosseini's, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* illustrate the situation through the living conditions of the female characters.

### **I- From Subjugation to Resilience of Women in Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns***

In Yasmina Khadra's novel, *The Swallows of Kabul*, Musarrat and Zunaira are portrayed as victims of a dual form of male subjugation. Residing in Kabul, a city where all forms of entertainment are forbidden, these women face severe restrictions on happiness, laughter, and even smiles in public. Since the Taliban seized power, their freedom of movement has been curtailed, and their roles in society reduced to meeting their husband's sexual needs and carrying out domestic chores. This gender-based assignment of roles aligns with the ideas put forth by Simone de Beauvoir, a key figure in the feminist movement, who argued that society

perceives a woman's destiny as tied to her reproductive capacity. Consequently, a woman's role is often confined to childbearing, nurturing, and managing the domestic sphere.

Zunaira, one of the novel's characters, embodies the struggles faced by Afghan women who were compelled to abandon careers fighting for women's rights and confine themselves to their homes. Zunaira is bound by the strict rules of the system and forbidden from venturing out alone. Consequently, like other women in Kabul, she becomes a mere shadow of her former self, concealed behind the imposed burqa. Zunaira undergoes a traumatizing experience when she and her husband, Mohsen, are caught laughing by a Taliban member while out for a walk. Mohsen is forced to attend collective prayer at the mosque, leaving Zunaira alone for hours under unbearable heat. This incident transforms Zunaira into a hysterical and resentful individual who feels suffocated by male presence in her life. As the novel describes, "how utterly the proximity of a man, any man, both disgusts and overwhelms her" (Khadra, 124).

Meanwhile, in a society that glorifies women solely through their servitude, Musarrat, who suffers from poor health, is imprisoned within the confines of her home, consumed by the darkness of her situation. She is denied the opportunity to venture outside and witness the light, unable to engage in activities that would alleviate her physical and psychological pain. Musarrat becomes a captive of herself, subjected to violence and repression. Her husband, Atiq, constantly complains about her failure to make his bed and cook for him, emphasizing his disregard for her well-being. At times, he even resorts to insults and attempts to physically harm her. For Atiq, Musarrat is seen as the source of his misfortune. The experiences of both Zunaira and Musarrat illuminate the profound challenges faced by Afghan women under the Taliban regime, where their autonomy and well-being are stifled, and their worth reduced to servitude and suffering. Furthermore, Atiq finds support from his close friends who encourage him to divorce Musarrat, suggesting he should find a healthy, obedient virgin who knows her place and serves her master without making any noise. "divorce her and get yourself a strong, healthy virgin who knows how to shut up and serve her master without making any noise" (Khadra, 24) In their eyes, Musarrat is an undesirable wife who is growing old and needs to be replaced. Thus, Musarrat is overwhelmed by a system that deprives her of her freedom, as well as a society that views her as a disabled woman simply because she fails to meet her husband's expectations.

In Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the female characters, including young girls, endure both social and political oppression. They are subjected to double oppression, both at the hands of their families or husbands and under the extremist rule of the Taliban, which works against their interests. Mariam and Laila, the two main female protagonists in the novel, suffer years of conjugal oppression inflicted by their elderly husband, Rasheed, and the Taliban regime. Once married, Rasheed restricts their movements, forbidding them from taking any action without his permission. They are not allowed to venture outside or engage in conversations with strangers, even if they are fellow women. Rasheed also enforces the wearing of burqas upon them, claiming it is to protect them and preserve his honor, stating that "a woman's face is her husband's business only" (Hosseini, 69).

Furthermore, the women in the novel are expected to be submissive and fulfill their husbands' needs. Throughout the story, Mariam and Laila are compelled to satisfy their husband's sexual desires, even if they do not want to. They are also burdened with household chores, cooking meals, doing laundry, and all the tasks associated with being a wife. Failure to fulfill these expectations exposes them to mental and physical abuse, as illustrated in the novel. When the Taliban impose their oppressive rules and codes of conduct on the populace, Rasheed is not bothered because they align with his own interests and work against the well-being of his wives. He complies with the Taliban's requirements by growing a beard and attending the mosque. This is evident when he refuses to accompany Laila to the orphanage to see her daughter, Aziza, knowing that if Laila were to go alone, she would be beaten and sent back home. "Rasheed was not bothered much by the Taliban. All he had to do was grow a beard, which he did, and visits the mosque which he also did" (Hosseini, 274). The examples from both novels demonstrate the multiple layers of oppression faced by Afghan women under the Taliban regime. They are subjected to domestic violence, restrictions on their movements, and forced compliance with strict gender roles. Their bodies, voices, and agency are controlled by men, perpetuating their subjugation and suffering.

Aziza, on the other hand, despite being just a child, experiences the same injustice and subjugation as the other female characters in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. She becomes a victim of both her "father" Rasheed and the oppressive system of the country. Throughout the narrative, it becomes evident that Aziza is marginalized and mistreated by her mother's husband simply because of her gender. From the moment she is born, he rejects her and exhibits his misogynistic attitude. The sound of her crying becomes unbearable to him, as he dismissively states, "This crying, I can't stand it...Take her outside" (Hosseini, 230). He shows no concern for her well-being, even smoking in her presence, and at times, he even expresses a wish for her death, callously remarking on child mortality statistics in Afghanistan: "I heard an interesting statistic. They said that in Afghanistan one out of four children will die before the age of five" (Hosseini, 233). Moreover, when the family faces financial difficulties, Rasheed's injustice towards Aziza takes another form. He chooses to send her to an orphanage instead of her brother Zalmai, highlighting the additional burden she bears due to her gender. This decision further underscores the systemic gender-based injustice Aziza endures. Later on, Aziza becomes oppressed by the very system that prevents her mother, Laila, from visiting her and denies her access to education in the orphanage. They are forced to pull the curtains, hiding from the Taliban, as Laila laments, "but we have to pull the curtains...so the Taliban don't see us" (Hosseini, 314).

In conclusion, it becomes evident that no female, whether a woman or a child, can escape the domestic tyranny and political oppression prevalent during that period in Afghanistan. The system confines women within the walls of their homes, stripping them of their autonomy and excluding them from participating in social activities. They are subjected to the double oppression of patriarchy and the political regime, perpetuating their subjugation and denying them basic rights and freedoms.

## **II. Sacrificial Love of Women**

Love and sacrifice are deeply intertwined concepts that cannot be separated. When we love someone, we are willing to go to great lengths to ensure their happiness, even if it means sacrificing our own lives. This theme is evident in both *The Swallows of Kabul* by Yasmina Khadra and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, where the power of love is portrayed not only in the context of spousal relationships but also in the love between a mother and her daughter.

In Khadra's novel, Musarrat represents the archetype of the submissive wife who is willing to die in order to please her husband. Despite her health issues, Musarrat pushes herself to fulfill her role as a housewife, hoping to gain her husband's attention and satisfaction. When Atiq falls in love with Zunaira, who is imprisoned and facing a death sentence for killing her abusive husband, Musarrat makes a profound decision. She chooses to sacrifice herself, believing that Zunaira can bring the happiness that she couldn't provide for Atiq: "She'll be everything I couldn't be for you" (Khadra, 176). Musarrat's sacrifice is her ultimate attempt to demonstrate the lengths a woman can go to in order to fulfill her husband's happiness. Tragically, Atiq, her husband, shows no remorse and is already thinking about another woman as Musarrat is being executed. This heartbreaking scene encapsulates the harsh reality under which Afghan women live in a male-dominated society. Similarly, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam and Laila develop a strong mother-daughter relationship as they navigate a society dominated by men and fight for their survival. Roshni Ray, in her article "*Women's Friendships and Feminism*," emphasizes the significance of female bonding in the struggle against oppression, stating, "Through the shared experience of frustration and anger, women are able to harness larger-scale social change" (Ray, 2020, 8). In the novel, Mariam and Laila unite against their oppressor, patriarchal structures, as they strive to overcome the damage caused by such systems.

Mariam forms a deep bond with Laila and her daughter, Aziza, as they fulfill Mariam's longing to become a mother. In their presence, Mariam experiences a newfound sense of happiness and love: "Mariam had never before been wanted like this. Love had never been declared to her so guilelessly, so unreservedly" (Hosseini, 246). They support and protect each other in the face of Rasheed's violence. When Rasheed attempts to kill Laila due to her involvement with Tariq, Aziza's biological father, Mariam, driven by fear and desperation, takes decisive action. She grabs a shovel and kills Rasheed to protect Laila. Despite knowing the consequences she will face at the hands of the Taliban, including a death sentence, Mariam chooses to sacrifice her own life so that Laila and Aziza can have a better and happier future.

In both novels, the power of love is exemplified through acts of sacrifice. Musarrat sacrifices her life for the happiness of her husband, while Mariam sacrifices herself to ensure a better life for Laila and Aziza. These stories shed light on the strength and resilience of women in the face of oppression and demonstrate the profound impact that love and sacrifice can have in challenging unjust systems.

### **III. Loss of Identity \and Dehumanization of Women**

Life under the oppressive Taliban regime is marked by immense hardship for women, who have been stripped of their rights, their societal roles, and face numerous challenges. The Taliban not only subject women to imprisonment and force them to cover themselves, but they also perpetrate violence against them, treating them as subhuman. Consequently, women find themselves marginalized, dehumanized, and robbed of their individual identities. In Khadra's novel, Zunaira embodies the tragic outcome of women under the Taliban regime. She was once a respected lawyer who fought for women's rights and enjoyed a prominent position in society. However, like all Afghan women, she is now confined and forbidden from venturing outside without her husband. With her strong and rebellious spirit, Zunaira feels a profound loss of identity and a sense of being reduced to a "non-existent" entity: "We're not anything anymore" (Khadra, 76). Refusing to wear the burqa, she rejects it as a symbol that erases her identity and features, deeming it a "damned veil" (Khadra, 77-78). Zunaira refuses to surrender her name, her unique characteristics, the color of her eyes, and the shape of her lips in order to conform and take a walk in public. Thus, she reaches a breaking point, unable to endure this imposed way of life any longer. She no longer perceives herself as a human being, expressing, "I'm neither a human being nor an animal" (Khadra, 78). In the face of such dehumanization, she becomes "something less than a shadow, an anonymous thing."

Similarly, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila represents the embodiment of a "revolutionary" and educated young woman with a promising future. She was nurtured by her father, who encouraged her education and challenged traditional Afghan norms, proclaiming that "marriage can wait, education cannot" (Hosseini, 114). However, after marrying Rasheed and with the rise of the Taliban, Laila is forcibly excluded from education, employment, and public life. She is compelled to wear the burqa and subjected to severe conjugal and political violence. Hosseini vividly portrays the dire conditions of hospitals in Kabul, where women are treated in a deplorable and inhumane manner. One heart-wrenching scene depicts Laila undergoing a caesarean surgery without anesthesia due to the scarcity of medical resources, highlighting the absence of anesthesia, oxygen, and clean water. The limited funds are diverted "to the places that cater to men" (Hosseini, 283). Female doctors, wearing burqas while working, struggle to keep their patients alive. Consequently, Laila's ambitious personality gradually fades away, and she is reduced, like countless other women, to a ghost hidden beneath her burqa. She becomes the "other" of a man, transformed from a fiercely independent woman into a dependent figure.

In both novels, the devastating impact of the Taliban regime on women's lives is vividly portrayed. They are deprived of their agency, their voices silenced, and their identities shattered. The burqa becomes a symbol of their erasure, reducing them to faceless and nameless entities. The resilience and strength of these female characters shine through as they navigate these oppressive circumstances, but their struggles serve as poignant reminders of the profound injustice and suffering experienced by Afghan women under the Taliban's male-dominated rule.

#### **IV. Women Between Trauma And Resilience**

The impact of trauma on mental health is a significant concern, particularly during wartime, as highlighted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Individuals are exposed to

a multitude of distressing experiences, and despite their resilience, they often develop various mental health conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. This theme of trauma is prevalent in contemporary literature, as authors often explore its effects on characters' lives. In *The Swallows of Kabul*, the female characters are subjected to a series of traumatic events that profoundly impact their mental well-being. Zunaira, for instance, experiences the loss of her freedom and identity under the oppressive Taliban regime. Her inability to pursue her passion as a lawyer and the constant fear she lives with contribute to her psychological distress. The trauma she endures manifests in her feelings of hopelessness, disillusionment, and ultimately, a sense of being reduced to a mere "non-existent" entity (Khadra, 76). She becomes trapped within herself, facing internal battles that mirror the external chaos surrounding her. Likewise, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the female characters face extreme hardships and trauma. Laila, for example, endures domestic abuse and political upheaval, which take a severe toll on her mental health. The loss of her family, the violent oppression she experiences at the hands of Rasheed, and the isolation she feels as a result of the Taliban's restrictions contribute to her profound psychological suffering. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that Laila's experiences have led to symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Her sense of self-worth is eroded, and she becomes a shell of her former self, disconnected from her ambitions and aspirations.

These novels highlight the devastating effects of trauma on female characters within the context of war and oppression. The authors depict the long-lasting psychological consequences that emerge from such experiences, shedding light on the complexities of trauma and its impact on mental health. Through these characters, readers gain insight into the harrowing realities faced by individuals who navigate environments filled with violence, injustice, and loss. By exploring the psychological aftermath of trauma in their narratives, Khadra and Hosseini provide a platform for raising awareness about the profound mental health challenges that war and oppression impose on individuals, particularly women. These novels serve as reminders of the importance of addressing and supporting those who have endured traumatic experiences, while also advocating for the creation of safe spaces and resources to promote healing and resilience. In "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" (2008) Michelle Balev states that,

The traumatized protagonist in fiction brings into awareness the specificity of individual trauma that is often connected to larger social factors and cultural values or ideologies. We can see that the trauma novel provides a picture of the individual that suffers, but paints it in such a way as to suggest that this protagonist is an "every person" figure. Indeed, a significant purpose of the protagonist is often to reference a historical period in which a group of people or a particular culture, race, or gender have collectively experienced massive trauma" (155)

Indeed, the female characters in both *The Swallows of Kabul* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* represent the collective trauma experienced by women in patriarchal Afghanistan, particularly during the rule of the Taliban. Zunaira, Mariam, and Aziza all endure significant hardships and traumatic experiences that shape their personalities and mental health.



In *The Swallows of Kabul*, Zunaira's traumatic experiences under the Taliban regime lead to profound psychological distress. Her forced silence and repression of anger after a traumatic incident in which she waits for her husband outside the mosque exemplify the stifling effects of the oppressive environment. Zunaira's withdrawal into silence and her projection of rage onto her husband demonstrate the pent-up frustration and indignation that haunt her psyche. Her eventual act of violence against her husband reflects the culmination of years of repression and trauma. Similarly, Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* confronts a lifetime of traumatic events, including abandonment by her father, an abusive marriage, and the constant threat of violence. Mariam's experiences shape her personality, causing her to repress her emotions and resist through silent resilience. Her act of killing her husband Rasheed represents a turning point where she takes control of her own life, breaking free from the cycles of abuse and repression. Despite her traumatic past, Mariam finds the strength to assert herself and pursue a path of her choosing.

Aziza, a child character in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, embodies the impact of war and violence on the younger generation. Growing up in a war-torn environment, Aziza exhibits politeness and grace despite her exposure to cruelty. However, she develops symptoms of PTSD after fleeing to Pakistan, experiencing nightmares and emotional sensitivity triggered by loud noises. Her post-war trauma is a testament to the lasting effects of the traumatic events she witnessed and endured. In both novels, the female characters' journeys reflect the resilience and courage of Afghan women in the face of trauma. By highlighting their struggles and eventual empowerment, the authors convey a message of hope and resilience. Zunaira's transformation in *The Swallows of Kabul* and Laila's role in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* symbolize the potential for change and progress in a post-Taliban era. These characters represent the strength and determination of Afghan women to reclaim their lives and shape a better future. It is important to note that trauma is a complex and multi-faceted issue, and the experiences of these characters in the novels are fictional representations. However, through their stories, the authors shed light on the real-life traumas endured by many Afghan women and the resilience they demonstrate in the face of such adversity.

In *The Swallows of Kabul*, Zunaira emerges as a symbol of resistance against fanaticism and a beacon of hope for a free Afghanistan. As an educated lawyer, she yearns to break free from the chains of tyranny and discrimination that have plagued her country. The culmination of her story comes with a miraculous escape from a Taliban execution, a powerful testament to her indomitable spirit and the resilience of the Afghan people. Zunaira's flight from oppression serves as a potent metaphor for the liberation of Afghanistan itself. Just like a swallow that has been imprisoned for years in its cage, Zunaira soars to new heights, signifying that the freedom and progress Afghanistan craves are not unattainable dreams but tangible possibilities. Her journey inspires readers to believe in the potential for positive change and to strive for a brighter future.

Similarly, Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* represents the hope and promise of a rejuvenated Afghanistan. Growing up under the nurturing guidance of her supportive father, she is instilled with the belief that her education is not only a personal pursuit but also a means to contribute to her war-torn homeland. Her father's words echo in her ears, reminding

her that Afghanistan needs her as much as it needs its men, if not more. Laila becomes a beacon of hope for the future, embodying the determination of a new generation of Afghans who refuse to succumb to despair. Despite enjoying a comfortable and peaceful life in Pakistan, Laila makes the courageous decision to return to her mother country, driven by a deep desire to rebuild and heal the wounds inflicted by the Taliban regime.

Laila's commitment to effecting change manifests in her efforts to combat illiteracy, particularly among children, who are the future of Afghanistan. Utilizing the funds left behind by Mariam, she establishes an orphanage that not only provides shelter but also serves as a center of learning. By becoming a teacher herself, Laila ensures that the children of Kabul have access to education, empowering them to shape a brighter future. Her actions convey a message of hope to readers, illustrating that even in the midst of devastation, individuals like Laila have the power to create a more stable, peaceful Afghanistan. Through her determination and resilience, Hosseini inspires us to believe in the transformative potential of education, compassion, and the unwavering human spirit. In summary, Zunaira and Laila serve as powerful symbols of hope and liberation in their respective novels. Zunaira's miraculous escape from Taliban execution highlights the possibility of freedom and progress for Afghanistan, while Laila's unwavering commitment to her homeland and her efforts to rebuild and educate the next generation embody the hope of a better, stable, and peaceful Afghanistan. Through their stories, Khadra and Hosseini convey messages of resilience, courage, and the transformative power of individuals who strive for freedom and progress despite the odds.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this article has sought to analyze and compare the portrayal of Afghan women under the Taliban in Yasmina Khadra and Khaled Hosseini's novels, shedding light on the harsh realities they face and the various forms of oppression and subjugation they endure. The analysis has revealed the prevalence of psychological and physical violence, patriarchy, and discrimination as oppressive mechanisms employed against Afghan women. Both Khadra's , *The Swallows of Kabul* and Hosseini's, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* share the common purpose of exposing the cruelty inflicted upon women in Afghanistan. These novels explore different facets of what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal society, delving into the complex themes that emerge from such a context. The struggle for Afghan women continues, as the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 has further intensified their challenges. In the face of renewed restrictions and limitations imposed by the Taliban, women persist in their fight for freedom. The Taliban's oppressive plans include curtailing their education, hindering their professional lives, and enforcing extreme gender apartheid, depriving women of their basic rights. This egregious treatment amounts to a violation of human rights, as every individual deserves to live freely and happily.

In light of these circumstances, it is imperative that we stand in solidarity with Afghan women and amplify their silenced voices to the world. As Malala Yousafzai aptly stated, "we must listen to the Afghan women and girls. They are asking for protection, for education, for the freedom and the future they were promised" (The New York Times, 2021). By actively supporting and advocating for the rights of Afghan women, we can contribute to the

dismantling of oppressive systems and work toward a more inclusive and equitable society. The plight of Afghan women serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing fight for gender equality and human rights worldwide. It is incumbent upon us to continue raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and taking meaningful action to ensure that every individual, regardless of gender, can live a life free from oppression and discrimination.

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