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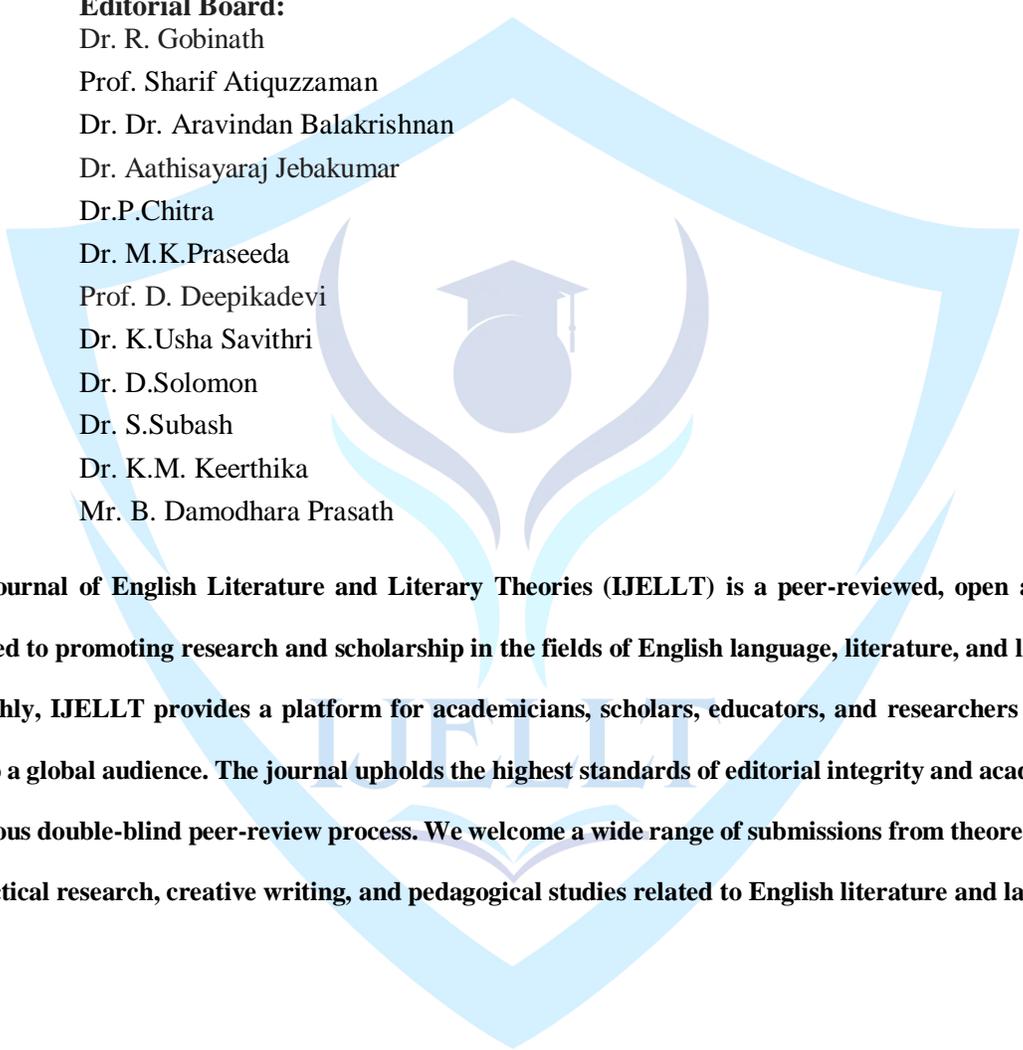
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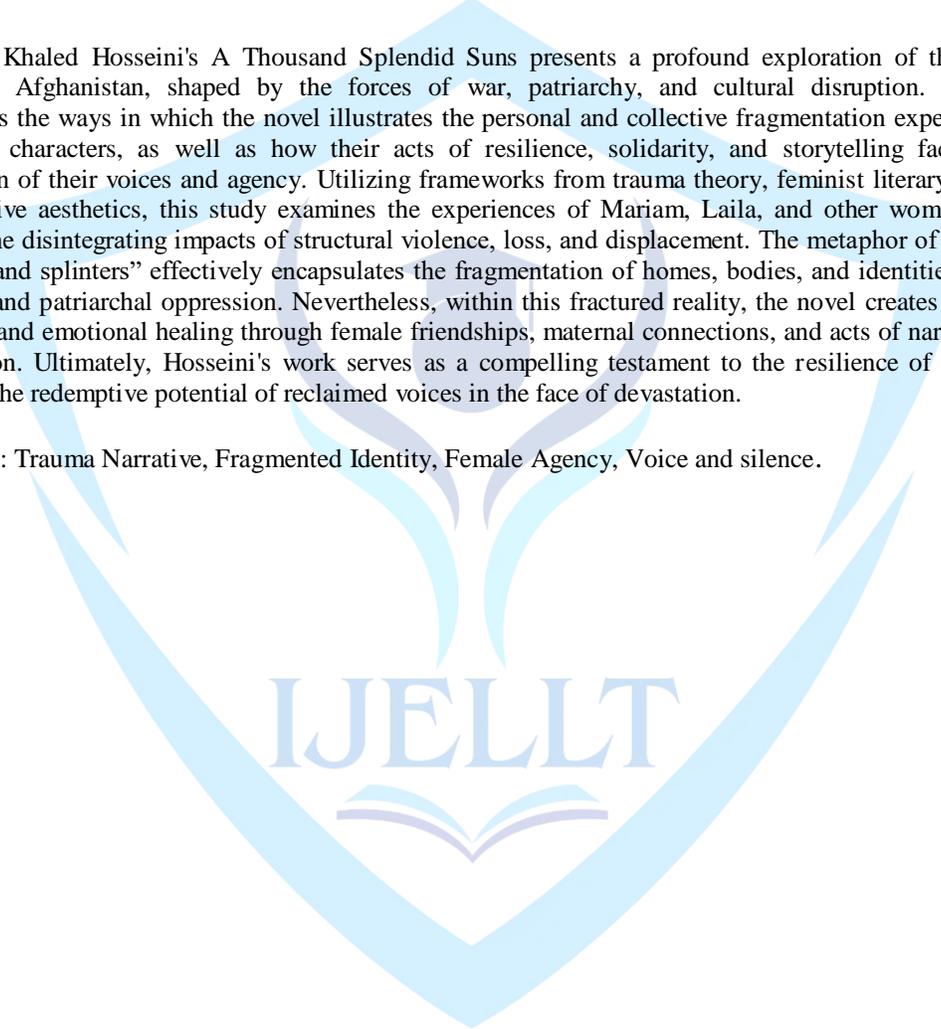
**A House of a Thousand Splinters: Fragmented Lives and Reclaimed Voices in A Thousand Splendid Suns**

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**Abstract:** Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* presents a profound exploration of the lives of women in Afghanistan, shaped by the forces of war, patriarchy, and cultural disruption. The paper investigates the ways in which the novel illustrates the personal and collective fragmentation experienced by its female characters, as well as how their acts of resilience, solidarity, and storytelling facilitate the reclamation of their voices and agency. Utilizing frameworks from trauma theory, feminist literary criticism, and narrative aesthetics, this study examines the experiences of Mariam, Laila, and other women as they confront the disintegrating impacts of structural violence, loss, and displacement. The metaphor of the “house of a thousand splinters” effectively encapsulates the fragmentation of homes, bodies, and identities resulting from war and patriarchal oppression. Nevertheless, within this fractured reality, the novel creates spaces for resistance and emotional healing through female friendships, maternal connections, and acts of narrative self-construction. Ultimately, Hosseini's work serves as a compelling testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the redemptive potential of reclaimed voices in the face of devastation.

**Keywords:** Trauma Narrative, Fragmented Identity, Female Agency, Voice and silence.



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In Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the political turmoil and deep-rooted patriarchy of Afghanistan converge to form a persistent environment characterized by fragmentation. By exploring the interconnected experiences of Mariam and Laila, the author illustrates the ways in which both public violence and private oppression contribute to the disintegration of homes, relationships, and individual identities. "Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman" (TSS 7). The novel's artistic structure a complex interweaving of fragmented timelines, disrupted domestic environments, and wounded bodies reflects the divisions inflicted by war and patriarchal systems within Afghan society.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* encompasses a time-frame characterized by persistent conflict, beginning with the Soviet invasion and extending through the period of Taliban governance. The political instability in Afghanistan functions not merely as a historical context but profoundly influences the daily lives of its populace. The narrative compellingly illustrates the disintegration of Afghan society due to war, resulting in the destruction of homes, the fragmentation of families, and the destabilization of individual identities.

As Laila surveys the city, now in a state of devastation, she remarks on the destruction as, "There are so many days when the city seems far away, like a mirage, and Kabul is just a collection of charred houses and shelled lives" (TSS 184). The depiction of fragmented architecture serves as a visual metaphor for fractured identities. The devastation of communal spaces reflects the disintegration of individual integrity, especially for women who are disproportionately affected by the gendered consequences of conflict. Amin Malak notes: "In Hosseini's Kabul, the scars of political violence inscribe themselves not only on the urban landscape but on the bodies and psyches of its female citizens" (Malak 12). In the novel, war is portrayed not merely as a remote political concept, but rather as a profound and personal trauma that is deeply experienced and embodied by the characters.

In the context of a devastated external environment, the domestic sphere, which has historically served as a sanctuary, transforms into an additional domain characterized by violence and domination. Patriarchal structures, bolstered by cultural conventions and political systems, convert the home into an environment marked by isolation and apprehension. The experiences of Mariam within Rasheed's household serve as a poignant illustration of this disintegration of domesticity. Following a miscarriage, her self-identity is profoundly disrupted. "I was nothing to Rasheed but a pair of breasts, two legs, and a womb." (TSS 99). Her reduction to mere bodily functions exemplifies the objectification of women within a patriarchal framework that undermines their autonomy.

Susan Bordo notes: "The female body is a medium of culture; a site of inscription where cultural anxieties and ideals are rendered visibly, often through expectations placed on women's comportment and self-presentation" (Bordo 165). Within the confines of Rasheed's residence, Mariam's body serves as a site of conflict, emblematic of patriarchal dominance and societal stigma.

Laila's experience exemplifies the ways in which domestic violence reflects the disintegration of the broader sociopolitical framework. Subjected to physical abuse, social isolation, and constant surveillance, Laila is compelled to maneuver through an environment in which both public acts of violence and private aggression jeopardize her safety. The personal terror she endures is inextricably linked to the systemic violence perpetuated by the state.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* employs its dual protagonists to demonstrate the ways in which systemic violence disrupts female subjectivity. From a young age, Mariam internalizes feelings of shame and illegitimacy, with her identity significantly influenced by the cultural stigma associated with being a harami. In contrast, Laila endures the loss of her family, home, and future aspirations as a consequence of war. Collectively, these characters exemplify the psychological fragmentation resulting from both external and internalized forms of oppression.

In the novel, the widespread destruction wrought by war, alongside the pervasive violence of patriarchal systems, results in the disintegration of both physical environments and female identities. The novel employs an aesthetic approach characterized by a fragmented narrative structure, vivid visual imagery, and poignant depictions of bodily trauma, which collectively reflect the disjointed consequences of systemic violence.

Both Mariam and Laila undergo traumatic experiences that significantly disrupt their sense of identity and selfhood. For Mariam, the origins of her trauma are evident from an early age; her designation as a harami, her rejection by Jalil, and the societal shame imposed by a patriarchal framework establish a lifelong pattern of internalized feelings of unworthiness. Each subsequent traumatic event such as her mother's suicide and her abusive marriage further compounds her psychological suffering. Consequently, Mariam's internal landscape becomes a repository of pain, shame, and silence.

In contrast, Laila's trauma unfolds within the context of national violence. The loss of her family due to a rocket attack, her coerced marriage to Rasheed, and the ongoing experience of domestic abuse destabilize her previously promising life. The external war reflects her internal turmoil, as both are characterized by fragmentation, volatility, and insecurity. The narrative illustrates how trauma dislocates Laila temporally and emotionally, leaving her in a state of limbo between past losses and an uncertain future.

Silence emerges in the novel as both a mechanism of oppression and a strategy for survival. Mariam's existence is largely defined by enforced silence; from her earliest years, she is conditioned to be obedient, invisible, and voiceless. In her marriage, Rasheed's violence and control compel her compliance through fear. However, over time, Mariam also employs silence as a form of agency a means of denying power to her oppressor and preserving her inner self.

Laila's relationship with silence is more nuanced. Initially characterized by her outspoken nature and intelligence, she learns the importance of caution within Rasheed's household. Nevertheless, even in her silence, she harbors a steadfast resolve to protect her children and resist total submission. The narrative posits that silence, although rooted in trauma, can also serve as a space for reflection, resistance, and resilience. While trauma and silence permeate the lives of Mariam and Laila, in the novel ultimately conveys a narrative of survival. Mariam's final act of agency killing Rasheed to protect Laila represents a profound reclamation of her selfhood. In this pivotal moment, her fragmented identity is restored, unified in a decisive and self-determined action.

Laila's survival encompasses both physical and psychological dimensions. She perseveres by fostering hope, love, and community. Her efforts to rebuild her life with Tariq and her return to Kabul to contribute to the nation's healing signify a transformed subjectivity shaped by resilience. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* presents a compelling exploration of female solidarity as a crucial mechanism for reclaiming voice. The initially strained relationship between Mariam and Laila transforms into a profound and protective bond, characterized as a sisterhood forged through shared adversity. This relationship creates a sanctuary in which silence is disrupted and voices are exchanged.

Mariam, who begins the narrative in a state of isolation and resignation, discovers in Laila not only companionship but also the fortitude to confront the oppressive structures that have long dictated her life. Their mutual support manifested in nurturing Aziza, enduring physical abuse together, and sharing fleeting moments of joy serves as a counter-narrative to the patriarchal forces that aim to divide and subjugate them. Consequently, solidarity emerges as a form of resistance, facilitating the development of both individual and collective agency.

Khaled Hosseini employs storytelling as both a literal and symbolic means of reclaiming voice. The novel itself is a complex narrative that provides the perspectives of two women who would otherwise remain voiceless in the public domain. The act of narrating their experiences whether through internal monologue, shared recollections, or direct dialogue serves as an assertion of their subjectivity? For Laila, storytelling is a means of preserving memory and identity, both for herself and her children. By recounting her family's history, her affection for Tariq, and her aspirations for the future, she asserts control over her narrative. Mariam, although less overtly expressive, undergoes a similar reclamation through her final act of agency. Her choice to take responsibility for Rasheed's death constitutes a narrative act, allowing her to reframe her life story from one of victimhood to one of empowered decision-making.

Throughout the novel, acts of female agency whether minor or significant disrupt the fabric of patriarchal oppression. From Laila's determination to send Aziza to school to Mariam's ultimate sacrifice, the novel delineates instances in which women assert control over their destinies. These actions are often deeply embodied, providing physical, emotional, and narrative resistance to domination. Importantly, Hosseini refrains from depicting agency as absolute or uncomplicated. The women's choices are frequently constrained by their circumstances, and their victories are often partial or hard-won. Nevertheless, the cumulative impact of these choices reconfigures their identities and relationships. Mariam's execution is not portrayed as a defeat but rather as a final act of self-definition, while Laila's return to Kabul signifies a deliberate reclamation of both public and personal space.

The novel presents a narrative characterized by fragmentation and resilience, highlighting the experiences of silenced voices and the reclamation of agency. The novel chronicles the fractured identities of Mariam and Laila two women profoundly affected by trauma, patriarchy, and conflict while elucidating the avenues through which they regain their voices, cultivate solidarity, and assert their agency. The trajectory of the narrative progresses from darkness to light, transitioning from enforced silence to self-determined expression, and from passive endurance to transformative action.

Hosseini employs the metaphor of "splinters" to illustrate the psychological, social, and cultural dislocations engendered by war and gender-based violence. Initially, Mariam and Laila's lives are marked by fragmentation due to loss, shame, physical confinement, and political instability. However, the novel's aesthetic of fragmentation does not signify irreversible disintegration; rather, it facilitates the reconstruction of identity through acts of resistance, love, and memory.

A pivotal aspect of this reclamation process is the restoration of voice. Mariam's ultimate act of agency and Laila's enduring dedication to her family and nation serve as significant affirmations of subjectivity. Judith Butler's notion of precarious life serves to elucidate this dynamic, "Precariousness exposes us to a violence that we cannot control, that comes from the outside, yet shapes the very conditions of our subjectivity" (Butler 29). Their voices, previously subdued by patriarchal dominance, resonate through acts of care, storytelling, and sacrifice. The solidarity they share presents a compelling vision of female strength that emerges from collective suffering and mutual support.

Furthermore, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* emphasizes the complexities of female agency within restrictive contexts. Hosseini refrains from idealizing the journeys of his protagonists or portraying freedom as an absolute state. Instead, he illustrates the incremental acts of resistance and choice that contribute to a more nuanced and embodied understanding of empowerment. The narrative arc of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* transitions "from splinters to light." The concluding images of Laila reconstructing her life and fostering hope for Afghanistan's future resonate with the potential for healing and renewal. Through its exploration of choice and transformation, Hosseini's novel affirms that, even amidst violence and loss, women can create lives imbued with meaning, dignity, and agency.



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