

## RESISTANCE AND EMPOWERMENT: A SOCIALIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S *A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS* AND TONI MORRISON'S *PARADISE*

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### Abstract

*The study explores feminist ideas regarding the experience of oppression among women as they struggle towards empowerment in the novels, A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini and Paradise by Toni Morrison. The study analyzes how patriarchal structures coupled with religious convictions and social political tension shape female identities in terms of the socialist feminist theory in Afghan and African American contexts. This study employs Mariam and Laila from Hosseini's work and Consolata and the women at the Convent to see how women communicate themselves in cases where they experience violence as well as exclusion by means of silence. Both books feature tales of women who resist their systemic oppression by means of collective action in an effort to attain autonomy despite differences in culture. The research employs qualitative text analysis by using feminist literary criticism techniques and close reading to derive thematic findings from the text.*

**Keywords:** *female oppression, resistance, empowerment, socialist feminist theory, patriarchal structures, religious ideologies, Afghan, African American, violence, exclusion, silencing, resilience, collective agency, autonomy, feminist literary criticism.*

### Introduction

Feminist literature functions to resist freezing patriarchal norms while also resisting self-determination of women. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Hosseini (2007) and *Paradise* by Morrison (1999) are two feminist literary examples that show women fighting oppression amid multiple struggles while also demonstrating strength in sociocultural and political systems. Systematic oppression is a common theme in both of these stories, set in Afghanistan and the United States. Although the two works are set in dissimilar culturally tenuous contexts, the two examples show women resisting oppression by seeking their autonomy in similar ways.

Through his novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini presents the cruel treatment that Afghan women suffered under the oppressive Taliban government. Through their lives Mariam and Laila face many severe challenges that include arranged marriages along with family violence and social rejection. Two hostile women transform their attitudes to forge a deep bond that proves how women help each other face hardships together. Their friendship enables both women to develop strength against oppression and fights against the authoritarian rule which attempts to reduce their voices. The act of giving her life illustrated how Mariam changed from being a passive victim into an active agent of change as reported by Akhtar et al. (2017) in their analysis of the book.

In *Paradise*, Morrison reveals the story of women who live at the Convent near Ruby Oklahoma's all-Black border. The multiple women live together inside the Convent where past scars from abuse guide them to find protection and personal recognition. Women who defy

conventional gender norms live together in defiance because their combined presence irritates male leaders until the situation leads to an explosive display of violence against such women.

Read (2005) explains how Morrison dismantles patriarchal gender two-sided systems by making black female bodies the focal points of fighting back against racial oppression while displaying the diverse struggles women face during racial tense moments. This research takes a socialist feminist approach to understand the multifaceted relationship between economic oppression along with patriarchal power structures in both literary works. Socialist feminism maintains that women face oppression because capitalism exploits them while patriarchal control exists simultaneously thus true liberation requires defeating both economic and gender discrimination (Eisenstein, 1979).

The economic bond which Mariam and Laila share with their abusive husband Rasheed illustrates the way capitalist systems create gender-based entrapment together with patriarchal systems. Through their rejection of work obligations and self-made independent system the Convent women directly resist patriarchal capitalist structures which attempt to limit them. Through their narrative structure both writers present the essential role of female unity and alternative group formation as active means of opposition. Hosseini tells the story of how the bond between Mariam and Laila grows strong enough to enable them to fight their oppressor till victory. Women's spaces serve as vital elements for feminist empowerment according to

According to McFadden (2007), women at the Convent establish a physical yet figurative domain allowing them to define their own identities after escaping Ruby's patriarchal religious rules. The existence of a women-only sanctuary demonstrates how collective female leadership overturns conventional power structures and demonstrates how social change occurs through unified female power. Despite differing cultural traditions, in the case of Afghanistan and the United States, these authors share a view on their experience with patriarchal oppression. The authors show different types of oppression women have to negotiate but also celebrate the strength of women, through their struggles.

The analysis of these narratives uses a socialist feminist lens as a way to deepen understanding of feminist globally and emphasize women's connections across cultural settings. These novels reflect the story of endured oppression alongside the powerful female fight that mobilizes as solidarity to subvert systems which aim to limit their freedoms. This study focuses on understanding the ongoing gender equality battle and the essential function of unified female action for creating paths to freedom.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the representation of patriarchal violence and women's resistance in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise* through a socialist feminist lens
2. To examine the formation of female solidarity and alternative communities as responses to systemic oppression in the novels, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise*

### **Significance/Rationale**

The study delivers substantial value by its approach to feminist literary analysis across different cultural contexts which shows how women's power struggles and self-determination rise above borders. Research has examined each of Hosseini and Morrison's works individually but there's limited investigation of their comparison through shared feminist principles. This analysis becomes crucial because researchers want to understand how multiple realities of gender along with race and religion and social status together create women's oppressed and challenging

circumstances and their ability to resist oppression. According to Eisenstein (1979) capitalist patriarchy manages economic production along with emotional work which appears in common between the novels. Exploring these texts as a pair helps readers understand feminist resistance through independent and group efforts.

### Research Questions

1. How are patriarchal violence and women's resistance portrayed in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise* through the lens of socialist feminism?
2. In what ways do female solidarity and the creation of alternative communities emerge as responses to systemic oppression in the novels, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise*?

### Research Gap

Previous studies like Akhtar et al. (2017) and Stuhr (2011) has explored female victimization and refuge in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, whereas Read (2005) and Voss (2010) examined identity and masculinity in *Paradise*. Few comparative studies that discuss both texts from a transnational socialist feminist point of view exist. However, there is still a knowledge gap. This study aims to fill the gap by examining how women's resistance in diverse cultural settings discloses identical patterns of patriarchal domination and feminist resistance

### Research Design and Methodology

The research design and approach to this study of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise* as criticisms of capitalist patriarchy are based on a theoretical and analytical approach inspired by socialist feminism and an intersectional framework of oppression. This approach centers on the interrogation of gender, class, and race relations as the building blocks of capitalist patriarchy, building on Eisenstein's (1979) theoretical writings on capitalist patriarchy and socialist feminism. For Eisenstein, the cross-cutting forces of gender and class oppression underpin the systemic oppression of women, particularly in underdeveloped societies. This provide the central premise of the analytical framework of this research, with a view to examining how such structures of oppression are both reflected and challenged within the literary worlds of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and *Paradise* by Toni Morrison.

This research utilizes a qualitative approach, employing feminist literary analysis to dismantle how the two authors present the convergence of capitalist patriarchy in their texts. The research examines how women are situated within systems of economic, emotional, and physical oppression and how these systems reinforce male-dominant social structures.. The research process involves a close reading of both texts, with a focus on the experiences of female characters within patriarchal structures and their reactions to gendered, class-based oppression.

As an extension of socialist feminist theory, this research also examines how these two novels analyze the capitalist patriarchy through a representation of women's struggles toward economic and emotional autonomy, and their search for solidarity and opposition. Using an intersectional lens, the study underscores how gender, class, and race intersect to create the lived realities of women in these societies, and specifically how these categories of oppression overlap and support each other. The research employs Eisenstein's (1979) concept of capitalism and patriarchy as interdependent systems of exploitation and applies this theoretical framework to the resistance tactics of the female protagonists and their bonding as means of collective self-defense against patriarchal and capitalist domination.

The methodology also involves the critique of private and public spaces, as discussed in socialist feminist literature such as Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1998), which advocates for

the professionalization of household work as a way of gaining economic autonomy for women. This has been used to examine how characters in both the novels negotiate the roles in the private domestic realm and how they resist the public realms that historically have been unavailable or exploitative for women. Through an exploration of these features, the study hopes to present a sophisticated critique of capitalist patriarchy, alongside examining the female characters' agency in overcoming social and economic repression.

The research draws from the core ideas of socialist feminism and adds a multi-dimensional framework of gender, class, and race to deconstruct capitalist patriarchy. With the close reading of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise*, the research attempts to illustrate how these novels can be used as both a criticism of patriarchal structures and a celebration of feminine solidarity and resistance. Through a consideration of the intersectionality of oppression in these stories, the research makes a broader contribution towards the understanding of how literature may represent and oppose the complexities of capitalist patriarchy.

### Literature Review

This section reviews studies on capitalist patriarchy in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and Morrison's *Paradise* (1999). These works are analyzed for how patriarchal structures impact women's lives. Researchers have used feminist, socio-political, and psychological perspectives to explore themes of oppression, resistance, and empowerment of women in capitalist societies.

Wekerle et al. (1980) examined how capitalism negatively affects women. They highlighted how society views women as belonging primarily to the private, domestic sphere, which makes their work undervalued. This undervaluing restricts women from engaging in public life. This issue is evident in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where characters like Mariam and Laila are trapped in domestic roles, facing violence when they try to assert independence. Wekerle et al. explained that such separation by gender limits women's opportunities in capitalist environments.

Likewise, Tétreault (2001) wrote about the interconnectedness of the public and private spheres and that women are subordinated when they are restricted to the private sphere where they are invisible and voiceless. According to her, the public sphere is where men exercise power without question. This seclusion of women to domestic spaces reflects the experiences of the women characters in both *Paradise* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where women's voices are silenced, and their agency is limited by patriarchal arrangements.

Jonsson (2018) used socialist feminist theory to study Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, discussing how women are exploited in a capitalist patriarchal society. He brought into perspective how the novel critiques patriarchal values using the opposing characters of Offred and Serena Joy, demonstrating the dehumanizing consequence of the system reducing women to mere instruments of reproduction. Such is the analysis relevant to both the works of Hosseini as well as Morrison, where females are equally subjected to patriarch ideologies but resist the same and regroup their might.

Yasemin and Sibel (2018) analyzed the role of women in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and in Sarah Moore Grimké's works with a socialist feminist approach. They were concerned with the oppression of women specifically those who, because of their economic circumstances, are victims of violence and exploitation when they attempt to defy patriarchal structures. The study emphasized the extent to which women's lack of empowerment in both the



family and the public domains impedes resistance against oppression. This runs through *Paradise*, where the nuns of the convent resist patriarchal rule and communal violence.

Suaidi et al. (2016) analyzed *Pride and Prejudice* from a feminist point of view, discussing the ways in which women are economically reliant on men because of society and the division of labor as gendered. The researchers used the argument that women in Austen's work are commodities with their value related to their status in society and marriageability. This critique of capitalist patriarchy parallels the struggles of women in Hosseini's and Morrison's novels, where the characters' value is often dictated by their relationships with men and their economic dependency.

Payne and Wermelling (2009) explained the psychological and economic obstacles encountered by women in violent relationships, citing that most women are stuck in violent relationships because they are economically dependent and have no resources. Their study highlights how social structures and psychological facts can trap women in oppressive situations. This is portrayed in the case of Mariam and Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as their economic and emotional vulnerabilities are taken advantage of by the men around them, hence making their escape a problem.

The literature discussed highlights the widespread influence of capitalist patriarchy on women, especially in the settings described in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise*. These works demonstrate how women's voices break through oppressive circumstances, and how their resistance, both individual and collective, undermines the patriarchal systems that attempt to silence them. By placing these works within wider feminist contexts, it is evident that the struggle for independence is a global one, cutting across cultural and geographical divides.

### Discussion and Analysis

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini offers a terrifying image of Afghan women during Taliban times. Mariam's illegitimate conception and compulsory marriage to Rasheed show the entrenched gender injustices. Her eventual union with Laila changes the lives of the two women as they fight domestic violence through mutual resilience. Akhtar et al. (2017) term Mariam's demise "a legitimate end to an illegitimate beginning," highlighting her move from victimhood to agency.

Similarly, in *Paradise*, Morrison builds a women's sanctuary in the Convent, where oppressed women heal from patriarchal violence. Consolata, as Mariam, retrieves religious power and establishes communal healing. As Read (2005) observes, Morrison deconstructs the purity and corruption binary by placing black women's bodies as sites of renewal and resistance at the center.

Both books critique religiously sanctioned patriarchy—either through Rasheed's abuse of Islamic teachings or the men of Ruby's fixation on Biblical purity. But both books also show feminine spirituality as redemptive. Anderson (2008) calls the ghostly presence in *Paradise* a metaphor for strength of ancestors, which is a contrast to the use of martyrdom and sacrifice by Hosseini.

Both stories highlight the importance of spaces for women, like the Convent or Mariam and Laila's home, as places where women can be independent and make their own choices. These spaces are crucial for empowering women, providing a refuge and a way to resist in challenging situations. They represent not just survival, but also the possibility of social and political change.

The study explores *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise* as examinations of capitalist patriarchy, analyzed through the lens of Socialist feminism. It covers several important topics: how

capitalist patriarchy exploits women, how women from various cultures face discrimination, how female friendships challenge this exploitation, and the contrast between public and private life.

Capitalist patriarchy is described as a system where women are marginalized due to class, gender, and race. Capitalism refers to an economic system where a small number of people own resources, while the majority work for wages. Patriarchy is a cultural structure where men have more power and family lineage follows the male line. Both systems exist globally across different societies, and when combined, they lead to increased oppression and discrimination against women. In these societies, men control economic and family spheres, which limits women's opportunities and positions them as subordinate in both public and private life. The research aims to show that, although cultures are different, they share common forms of oppression against women. The ways women defend themselves in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise* offer a shared narrative against capitalist patriarchy.

Both stories emphasize how important women's spaces are, like the Convent or Mariam and Laila's home, as places where women can find strength and independence. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, the setting is Afghanistan, where men dominate all key parts of society. Afghanistan's long history of internal and foreign conflicts has weakened its legal system. When combined with cultural customs that favor men, strict tribal laws, and extreme religious views, women suffer even more. The story shows how these elements come together to oppress women in emotional, physical, psychological, social, and cultural areas. Afghan women are often seen just as mothers who must have sons, comfort men, and maintain family honor. They are kept at home, covered up, and told this is to shield them from men's eyes. However, this is used to control them, keeping them confined at home with no freedom to make their own decisions, making them financially dependent on men. Women in these situations often fail to see that staying home is not for their protection but a method of control.

Toni Morrison's *Paradise* deals with a different environment, focusing on racial conflicts within the African American community. In *Paradise*, women face oppression similar to Hosseini's depiction, but the perspective is different. The African American community in the book, while trying to survive and establish their own town, Ruby, still treats women as less important. Women here are mainly valued for having children. Morrison critiques this situation by showing how gender, class, and race contribute to women's oppression. Women in *Paradise*, like those in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, live under male control, which is reinforced by their financial dependency on men and by cultural and racial rules that limit their freedom and autonomy.

Morrison's depiction of women's oppression is seen in the way that the male figures, especially the men of Ruby, oppress the women even when the women contribute significantly to the community. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Rasheed is a character that reflects the oppressive actions of patriarchy as he subjects Laila to the same humiliation and manipulation that Mariam faces. Rasheed's effort to master Laila through condemning her upbringing and guilt-tripping her for her parents' inability to instill good Islamic values in her is an echo of his previous abuse of Mariam. Throughout the course of the novel, Rasheed's brutality worsens, and Laila comes to pierce the veneer of the male protection racket, recognizing that her oppression is part of an overarching system of domination. This disillusionment process reaches its climax when Laila, driven by sheer survival, chooses to flee Rasheed's tyrannical hold.

In the same way, in *Paradise*, women of the Convent form their own closed economy, producing goods using their own resources and labor, independent of men. Yet, their economic

independence undermines the men of Ruby, who dread the new power balance. The men's refusal to allow the women their autonomy and ultimately violent behavior serve to underscore the continuity of patriarchal control. Morrison's nuanced description of the Convent women's independence and the town's ultimate violence against them illustrates the intersectionality of oppression—where race, gender, and class intersect to maintain women oppressed.

Both novels expose the ruinous impact of capitalist patriarchy on women, showing how it victimizes and excludes them in different cultural and racial contexts. Through her examination of the books, the researchers reveal how women, even with a similar experience of oppression, employ female solidarity and bonding as resistance forms in resisting the patriarchal system that would like to dominate them.

### Conclusion

This feminist comparative analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Paradise* demonstrates that both Khaled Hosseini and Toni Morrison utilize their tales to examine the intricate dynamics between female oppression, resistance, and empowerment. By exploring the struggles of women under drastically different cultural and geographical scenarios—Afghanistan and African American communities—the research underscores the global nature of women's wars against patriarchal systems and their marginalization from society. In the perspective of socialist feminist theory, the critique highlights the pivotal position of patriarchal ideologies, religious frameworks, and socio-political contexts in the constitution of women's identities and experiences.

In the two novels, Mariam, Laila, Consolata, and the Convent women personify resilience, agency, and solidarity, subverting oppressive forces by collective action and the exercise of autonomy. The research highlights that, no matter what their backgrounds are, women's voices are crucial to resisting silencing, exclusion, and violence. The novels express a shared vision of empowerment and hope, providing deep insights into the power of women to re-claim their identities and define their futures despite adversity.

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