

Ecofeminism in A Thousand Splendid Suns: The Intertwining of Nature and Women's Destiny

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ABSTRACT

This paper will provide an in-depth analysis of the long novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Afghan-American writer Khaled Hosseini from the perspective of ecofeminism. By exploring the relationship between women and nature, women and society, and women and self in the novel, it reveals the embodiment of ecofeminism in the work, and then analyses how the novel reflects the realistic dilemmas of the Afghan society and women's state of existence with the help of the perspective of ecofeminism.

KEYWORDS

Ecofeminism; *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; Female Oppression; Nature Symbolism; Social Resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Khaled Hosseini and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini is a writer who has gained considerable attention in the world of literature in recent years. He was born in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and his father was an Afghan diplomat, and his family fled to the United States to seek political asylum after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980. *The Kite Runner* is Hosseini's debut novel as well as his most famous work, which jumped to the top of the national bestseller lists upon its release in 2003 and was made into a film in Hollywood [1].

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a full-length novel written by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini, which debuted on 22 May 2007 in the United States. The novel is Hosseini's next classic after *The Kite Runner*. From a female perspective, the author tells the story of how two Afghan women, under the double oppression of war and domestic violence, support each other, face adversity together, and ultimately achieve self-awakening and growth. The novel became the best-selling book in the United States upon its release and was widely acclaimed, with sales exceeding one million copies in just one week after its release. The Chinese version of "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*" was imported and launched by Century Literature in August 2007, setting a record for the fastest Chinese version ever imported into China.

1.2. Literature Review

In recent years, with the rise of feminist thinking and the rise of ecofeminism, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the embodiment of ecofeminist theories in literary works. Various

scholars have studied *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from different fields and using different theories, and have put forward their own different insights accordingly. As an interdisciplinary field, ecofeminism is centred on exploring the relationship between nature and women, and how this relationship interacts and influences each other in society, culture and the environment.

Internationally, ecofeminism has become an important field of study that not only focuses on gender but also delves into the impact of human activities on the natural environment and how these activities exacerbate gender inequality. Research based on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has shown that this work can provide a unique perspective for understanding ecofeminism, especially in exploring the connection between women and nature and how this connection is constructed and sustained in patriarchal societies.

In China, the study of ecofeminism started late, but has begun to receive attention in recent years. In recent years, studies on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have sprung up in China, with different perspectives, and since 2007, some authors have been studying *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, but they all focus on one aspect. Given that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is of high literary value, and the ecofeminism involved in the novel is the theoretical basis for women's pursuit of equality in today's society, interpreting Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from the perspective of ecofeminism can help disseminate Hosseini's notion of women's equality, stimulate new thinking about women's relationship with nature, and criticise the Afghan social system and ideology that represents the will of male power, as well as promote the development of feminism in the contemporary world. Promote feminism in contemporary times [2], especially about how to find a more just and sustainable model of development in the process of modernisation.

However, despite the fact that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* provides rich research material for ecofeminism, ecofeminism itself still faces some challenges and criticisms. On the one hand, ecofeminism needs to further clarify its theoretical framework and research methodology in order to better respond to criticisms and questions from different disciplines. On the other hand, with the intensification of globalisation and the environmental crisis, the practical significance and application prospect of ecofeminism are also receiving more and more attention, which requires scholars to continuously innovate and expand its theory and methodology.

In conclusion, the current state of domestic and international research on ecofeminism in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* suggests that the field is undergoing rapid development. Both internationally and in China, scholars are endeavouring to explore how to more effectively combine ecofeminist theory and practice to promote the common goals of gender equality and environmental protection.

2. OVERVIEW OF ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism is a product of the combination of the women's liberation movement and the ecological movement, and is one of the important schools of both feminist studies and ecological philosophy. It approaches ecological issues from a gender perspective, pointing out that both patriarchal domination and man's domination of nature are rooted in an understanding of patriarchy as logic, and then proceeds to an in-depth critique [3].

Ecofeminism emphasises the connection between women and nature, a connection that is reflected not only in the marginalised and oppressed state that women share with nature, but also in women's care and protection of nature. It believes that both women and nature have been oppressed and exploited by a patriarchal society, and therefore advocates the breaking down of the traditional division of gender roles to achieve equality between men and women, while at the same time calling for harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature, and the protection of the Earth's homeland.

3. EMBODIMENT OF ECOFEMINISM IN A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

3.1. Women's Connection to Nature

Ecofeminism sees a special connection between women and nature that is not only physical but also emotional and spiritual. The view sees a relationship between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature, a connection that challenges traditional binary modes of thinking and proposes a more complex and pluralistic view of the world. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, this relationship is clearly demonstrated. Specifically, female characters in the novel, such as Mariam and Laila, not only have to face the direct damage caused by the war, but also have to endure the suffering of hunger, illness, and the displacement of refugees. These descriptions not only reveal the challenges of women's survival under extreme conditions, but also reflect their close connection with the natural environment. The rampant destruction of the natural environment in a war-torn environment further exacerbates the plight of women. Both Laila and Mariam, the heroines of the novel, have sought solace and strength in nature. Mariam's childhood memories are often accompanied by nature, in which she finds solace and comfort for her soul. Mariam's life experiences were closely linked to nature. She was born in an isolated village and nature became the refuge of her childhood. However, this connection is severed as she is forced to marry Rashid and enter city life. Mariam's personal fate is contrasted with the deprivation and destruction of nature, reflecting the marginalisation of women in society. Laila, on the other hand, has sought a moment of peace and freedom in nature while suffering from domestic violence. This connection between women and nature reflects the importance that ecofeminism places on the relationship between women and nature.

At the same time, from the perspective of ecofeminism, the relationship between women and nature in the novel is also reflected in how they find strength and hope in adversity. For example, the mud hut imagery is an important symbol in the novel, which not only represents the women's living environment, but also symbolises their resilience and adaptability in a difficult environment. The mud hut imagery recurs throughout the novel, which not only symbolises their physical space, but also their reflection on and challenge to traditional family and social roles.

In addition, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the growth experiences of the main characters, Mariam and Laila, correspond to the seasonal changes of nature, and their living conditions and psychological changes reflect the close association between women and nature. This connection is not only reflected in their dependence on the natural environment, but also in their attitudes and choices of life, demonstrating a way of living in harmony with nature. Taking Maryam as an example, as soon as she was born, she became what everyone calls a "Harami", which means illegitimate daughter. Her father, Zaryl, is a rich man from the upper class of Hetla, while her mother, Nana, is just a maid, and due to the difference in status between the two men as well as Maryam's birth, the "scandal" that should not have happened has been brought about. The difference in their status and Mariam's birth made this undeserved "scandal" even more humiliating and brought shame to the male society represented by Zaryl. In order to save face, Zaryl did not marry her, but kept her and her daughter in a humble hut on the outskirts of the village of Guldman, far away from the people and isolated from the rest of the world. As an illegitimate daughter, Maryam was not recognised by society and often suffered from the strange looks of others, an ostracism that made her highly attuned to nature. As a young girl, Mariam lived a carefree life in a mud hut, she was pure, kind and innocent, and her father's visit every Thursday was the happiest and most joyful time for her, at which time Mariam's life was as hopeful as spring. On her fifteenth birthday, in order to be able to live with her father every day, she left the mud hut alone to go to the city to look for him, she did not suffer from ostracism and disgust, as her mother said, which made her expectations of Zaryl's perfect father figure and happy family life reach its peak, at this time is a short summer time in her life. However, when she experiences her mother's suicide and her father delivers her to Rashid himself, the heaven and earth she has built up inside her collapses, and from then on the tragedy of her life kicks off and her life enters the autumn. Until finally, with one miscarriage after another, one domestic violence after another, her life ends with

winter. This oppression of women contrasts sharply with the novel's depiction of the natural environment, which not only reveals women's marginalised position in traditional society, but also hints at the complex interaction between them and the natural environment.

3.2. Women's Struggle Against Society

Eco-feminism advocates against the oppression of women and nature, and calls for the liberation of women and the protection of nature. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam and Laila suffer from oppression and violence in a patriarchal society, and their resistance and survival demonstrate resistance to oppression and the pursuit of freedom, revealing how the patriarchal system oppresses both women and natural resources. This oppression is not only manifested in the physical and mental control of women, but also in the exploitation and destruction of the natural environment, and there is an intrinsic link between these two oppressions, both stemming from anthropocentric and masculinocentric values [4].

In Afghan society, women were often in a vulnerable position, oppressed and exploited by the patriarchal society. At that time, Afghan women were not able to obtain even the most basic human rights, they were under the oppression of the patriarchal system, they had to go out in heavy burqas, veiled, with only their eyes showing, and women had to be accompanied by a man when they went out or they would be beaten.

The two heroines, Mariam and Laila, live in a strong patriarchal society where they become subordinate and private property of men. However, despite the oppression from both family and society, they do not succumb to violence, but rather achieve an awakening and breakthrough through mutual cooperation and resistance. This awakening is not only about taking control of one's own destiny, but also about challenging traditional gender roles.

Unlike Maryam, young Laila is educated, her father tells her that women should also go to school and don't have to wear a burqa to go out, and her mother sets an example. Her father's education has kept a sense of defiance in Laila's heart, and in the face of Rasheed's domestic violence, she waits for an opportune moment to strike back, while her love for her daughter, Aziza, is the driving force and courage for Laila's defiance.

Although war and destruction have caused her to lose her lover and her family, she still maintains a yearning in her heart for nature and the beauty of life. Laila's fight is not only for survival, but also to protect the piece of nature in her heart. On the other hand, Mariam, because of the different environment in which she grew up, received the mainstream education in Afghanistan at that time, and submitted to the marriage arranged by her father, endured her husband's constant violence, but the education she received from childhood told her to be patient, and her mother often told her that "a woman only needs to be good at one thing, and that is to be patient". It wasn't until she met Laila that she realised there was another way to live, to live with dignity, to live for yourself. Under Laila's influence, she gradually begins to enjoy life, they occasionally prepare a simple afternoon tea for themselves when Rashid is out; they begin to secretly save money and plan their escape; when they are discovered by Rashid, they begin to face Rashid's beatings head-on, and will also fight back or hide. In the end, although Mariam ends up dead, her life journey and her struggle against male power illustrate deconstructionism's deconstruction of the male/female dichotomy [5]. Mariam's act of killing her husband is not only a rebellion against personal oppression, but also symbolises the transcendence of traditional gender roles. This act embodies the quest for female self-realisation and liberation in ecofeminism. Laila, on the other hand, regains her life, and her story shows the process from endurance to awakening and rising up in resistance. In addition, the different fateful endings of Mariam and Laila, as well as their growth and redemption in the context of male supremacy and extreme religiosity, demonstrate that even in the same social context, different individuals may have different ways of resistance and outcomes. This not only reflects individual differences, but also reveals the impact of the social environment on women's path of resistance.

3.3. Exploration of the Feminine and the Self

Ecofeminism believes that in order for women to be liberated, it is necessary to break down all oppressive relationships based on dualism. This oppression is not only male oppression of women and human oppression of nature, but also includes all oppressions such as national oppression and religious oppression. And in order for the oppressed women to be liberated, they must unite all the oppressed and form an alliance. In the novel, Laila and Mariam, the two heroines, are oppressed by Rashid, the symbol of extreme patriarchy, and they are natural allies. It is worth noting that the novel positively affirms the role of women's "sisterhood" in the path of women's emancipation, and that this state of mind and mode of behaviour of mutual help and cooperation, and resistance to the death, is an indispensable part of women's struggle.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila and Mariam not only face external oppression and hardship, but also experience internal struggle and exploration. As they support each other, they come to realise their own value and strength, and they realise that in order to be liberated from patriarchal oppression, women must awaken and rise up against it.

Mariam, who has met no one in her life and has no sense of resistance at all, feels the warmth of being needed by Laila's daughter, Aziza, who gives her a renewed hope for life. Therefore, when Laila was about to be strangled by Rashid at the critical moment, Maryam bravely raised the shovel and smashed Rashid. This is when the idea of liberation and defiance in her completely explodes, "It was the first time she decided the trajectory of her life"[6]. Maryam chose to sacrifice herself, leaving the hope of living to Laila, at this time she is full of human light, truly become a complete sense of the individual, which is not only the pursuit of freedom and liberation, but also a kind of great love beyond life and death. [7] Although she paid the price of her life, she exchanged freedom and happiness for her loved ones, and at the same time, she gradually became a strong person and gained self-redemption. For Laila, she used to have knowledge and the ability to earn a living, but due to the war, social discrimination and family confinement, she has only been able to operate in the small circle of the family. It was only after the fall of the Taliban government and the end of the war in Afghanistan that she was finally able to use her working ability to gain her due social status, and to prove to the world that Afghan women can also become economically independent and independent individuals with a sense of subjectivity. Like men, they contribute to society, reflecting their own values and reaping their own rewards.

In the end, as Laila says, "We want Kabul to be green again". As long as humans don't destroy it, the living nature will slowly recover with its own powerful self-healing ability, a quality that women possess - resilience, tenacity, perseverance. All the oppressed Afghan women will eventually recover like the natural ecosystem and revitalise the whole Afghan society. [8]

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* integrates the core concepts of eco-feminism, showing the intertwining of nature and women's destinies as well as women's active role in environmental protection through the portrayal of women, the depiction of the environment and the focus on ecosystems. Through the depiction of Afghan women and the natural environment, it reveals that both women and nature face similar oppression and exploitation in a patriarchal society. Eco-feminism provides a new perspective, emphasising the need to fundamentally change human worldviews and values in order to achieve harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature, and between human beings, and at the same time calls for attention to be paid to the relationship between women and the environment, and for joint efforts to build a more harmonious human-nature symbiotic society. This is not only a profound interpretation of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, but also a useful reflection on the current ecological crisis and gender inequality.

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