

Interpretation and Description of The Image of Women in Fiction

(Based on The Novel by Khalid Hussein "A Thousand Rays of The Sun")

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Abstract: This article examines the issues of studying the image of women and their subtle psyche in world and Uzbek literary criticism and related fields, as well as opinions and discoveries made in the course of research work on this issue. Also in fiction, in particular in Khalid Hussein's novel "A Thousand Rays of the Sun", the image of a woman and her place in society, her attitudes on difficult life paths, and the principles of psychological depiction are analyzed.

Keywords: World literature, Khalid Hussein, "A Thousand Rays of the Sun", writer's skill, image, spirit.

Introduction: In world literary studies, the psychological exploration and interpretation of problems related to the analysis of literary prose are becoming pressing issues on the agenda of the humanities. Especially in the field of philology, opportunities have been created to conduct ideologically sound, substantively complete, and qualitatively new scientific research. Research continues systematically on the literary and artistic canons characteristic of the epic genre of the novel, the depiction of the extraordinary torments of the human condition, and the study of its multilayered spiritual world. Analytical research of women's psychology is important in discovering the principles inherent in a person's spiritual world, worldview, and mode of thinking. The literary process always develops in close connection with the social environment, as well as with literary-spiritual and cultural life. Indeed, the renewal of human consciousness and thought, and changes in the psyche, are most vividly reflected in literature and art. In this, the science of literary studies has also taken a fresh look at its object, moving toward a deeper understanding of issues related to women's psychology.

At the same time, there are dozens of ideological themes such as honesty and hatred of enemies. Each of these has been deeply and comprehensively interpreted in the verbal art of hundreds of peoples for thousands of years. In terms of status, however, none of them stands on as high a pedestal as the expression and depiction of women. Among the scholars who have studied the female image and her delicate psychology in world literary studies and related fields are Ye.A. Shabatura, O.V. Mitina, Pak Chjin Hvan, N.V. Vorobeva, Noruzi Maxnaz, Yu. Afanaseva, N.L. Mirkushina, A.P. Karagoda, A.A. Khalaf, V.G. Andreeva, A.P. Kashkareva, A.V. Peretyagina, N.A. Shoyeva, G. Mukhabbatova, T.N. Ivanova, Li Xi Su, Tao Li, and O.V. Smirnova. In their scientific research and articles, the image of women and their role in society, their conduct in the difficult paths of life, and the principles of psychological depiction have been studied. Furthermore, prominent Uzbek literary scholars such as I. Sulton, A. Alimuhamedov, M. Qo'shjonov, U. Normatov, Y. Solijonov, Q. Yo'ldosh, B. Karimov, and Z. Isomiddinov have also addressed the various aspects of women's, mothers', and girls' psychology in their articles and books.

In literature, which is the interpreter of the beauty of human nature, the science of understanding and discovering the female heart is of prime importance. Even ancient works were dedicated to women, featuring them and matters related to them, without doubt. It can even be said that the development of literature is closely connected with the artistic study of women's psychology and its gradual deepening.

Life presents a diversity of destinies. Along the paths of existence, a person becomes tempered, refined, and shaped. The trials of fate do not distinguish between woman or man, young or old; they do not classify them into categories. To endure trials with resilience and fortitude, to look them straight in the eye, to have a will of iron and a heart in which goodness is a guiding principle, to place the peace of one's family and the safety of one's children above oneself—such are the women deserving of boundless praise and admiration. It is well known that Eastern women are particularly distinguished by qualities such as devotion to family, love for children, loyalty, and obedience. In every era and time, women have strived to ensure the prosperity of their families and to create all possible opportunities and conditions for the upbringing and success of their children.

Literary scholar Y. Solijonov writes about this as follows:

"The distinctive feature of the prose works created in the first decade of the 21st century is that they brought to light the images of people who, in this process, became divided into the poles of good and evil. Among such characters, in particular, the unique interpretation of women's character is of great importance. This is not surprising, because during the period when the management of the market economy was being formed, women also began to show greater activity. After all, by her very nature, a woman desires her household to always be orderly and prosperous. In pursuit of this goal, she sometimes behaves rashly, does not let her husband rest, raises quarrels. To achieve her aim, she may even go as far as sacrificing herself" [4, 148].

It is well known that in the 20th century, Western women were imagined only as figures engaged in household chores. This was explained by the lack of protection of women's rights and their passive participation in social life. Such a situation, and the refusal to accept it, created the conditions for the emergence of the feminist movement. Writers, who accepted literature as a transparent mirror of society, were convinced that only works approached objectively could achieve artistic immortality. Women, as an eternal theme of literature, found their unique

expression not only in the works of male writers but also in those of female writers, and in literary studies this approach came to be known as feminist criticism.

From past realities, we can learn through the works of feminist authors that women faced various obstacles in understanding themselves, developing and demonstrating their talents. As the well-known writer and literary scholar Mary Gordon put it: "Women seemed to be performing their 'roles' in this life as if from a mirror in which men appeared twice as large. Men were always dominant everywhere, and if a woman happened to discover something, for some reason it deeply wounded the pride of men" [5, 8]. Indeed, the issue of equality between women's and men's rights has been a topic of heated debate since ancient times.

In literary studies, one of the main tendencies in the conception of time and space among those focusing on depicting the tragic fate of women is the objective representation of pre-war, wartime, and post-war periods in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.

In world literature, the fate of women in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has been a subject of great interest and critical debate. Writers such as Khaled Hosseini, Farah Ahmadi, Mir Tamim Ansary, Anne E. Brodsky, Veronica Doubleday, Deborah Ellis, Doris Lessing, Harriet Logan, Sunita Mehta, Nelofer Pazira, Deborah Rodriguez, Rosemary Scain, Mari Smith, and Zoya have written specifically on the theme of Afghan women. Thus, women's role in society belongs to the eternal themes of literature, and this is vividly reflected in Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* [8, 9]. This novel, published in 2007, is a feminist-oriented work that brought Hosseini recognition and prominence as a writer.

As Ibrohim Haqqul remarked: "When you can understand and lovingly read the works of a certain author, you cannot remain indifferent to the author's personality either" [2, 48]. Indeed, Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* quickly entered the ranks of works that gained both critical acclaim and wide readership recognition. At the same time, readers' interest in the writer himself grew, bringing him closer to the higher steps of fame.

The central element of the novel's plot is the fate of Maryam and Laila. During Hosseini's visit to Kabul in 2003, when he saw women wearing old veils, sitting on street corners with four, five, or even six children, begging, the idea of writing about Afghan women took shape as a literary concept. Deeply troubled by the condition of women in Afghanistan, the author listened to their heart-wrenching life stories and acknowledged

that they possessed stronger spirit, will, and endurance than men.

The events of the novel unfold in the ancient Afghan cities of Herat and Kabul. The main characters are two women who become victims of the upheavals that shattered Afghanistan's peaceful life. From the very preface of the novel, the narrative draws the reader into thought-provoking and emotionally moving realities. "Maryam was five years old the first time she heard the word 'harami' (bastard)"; in another place: "Of course, it was not her fault; the blame lay with those responsible for her birth. Yet Maryam sensed that the word carried a bad meaning. As she grew older, she understood everything" [8, 6].

In the images of Maryam and Aziza, Hosseini depicts the unfortunate childhoods of characters whose lives began under the same "tainted" status. Though these mistakes were committed by their parents, the dark stigma was inscribed upon the destinies of the children.

In the course of events, the novel reflects the despair and hopelessness felt by Afghan women about the future. The oppression, violence, and violation of their rights evoke a sense of pity in the reader. In reality, it is a proven truth that the future of society will be bright only if its women are healthy (both physically and spiritually). However, the wars in Afghanistan not only exhaust the people but also rob them of faith in tomorrow. Furthermore, the treatment of women diminishes human dignity. As Mariam's mother says: "Every snowflake is a cry that has flown from a woman's heart. These laments turn into clouds, rise to the sky, and then descend as snow. Yes, my daughter, we women were created only for grief and sorrow!" [8, 60].

As the story unfolds, vile, unjust, and misguided individuals, sinking into the swamp of immorality, negatively impact the lives of civilians, particularly women's fate. Reading the novel, one realizes that such conflicts arise from a lack of both religious and secular knowledge, from blindly falling under the sway of alien ideologies, and becoming their slaves. Some so-called scholars, who establish dominance through such foreign ideas, do not hesitate to commit any kind of wickedness for their own interests. In fact, history shows that in order to conquer a nation or country, depriving it of knowledge alone has been sufficient. Indeed, where the lamp of knowledge does not shine, development and progress cannot exist. Preventing women from receiving an education inevitably affects the progress of tomorrow and the upbringing of future generations.

At all times and in all places, society has advanced and

prospered only through knowledge. The maturity of any nation is, first of all, determined by the intellectual and cultural development of its women. Educated, intelligent, and enlightened women create the great future of a nation. Therefore, as the wise say: "If you educate a girl, you educate an entire family" [1]. Truly, children who are raised by enlightened and well-mannered mothers, who serve as noble role models, grow up to become useful members of society. Such a society, nurtured by educated individuals, will undoubtedly have a great future. Furthermore, medicine has established that in child upbringing and development, the mother's intellectual and educational capacity plays a decisive role. An article published on November 16, 2016, on gnesso.ru titled "A Child's Intelligence Is Determined by Maternal Genes" states that much of a child's abilities and potential are inherited from the mother: "At different times, scientists have proven that a person's height, weight, fingerprints, predisposition to diseases, and even depression are inherited. There were also beliefs that intellect is inherited from the father. However, German scientists refuted this claim. Their large-scale studies concluded that the ability for intellectual development is passed not from the father, but from the mother. It turned out that paternal genes regulate the limbic system – responsible for the functioning of internal organs, emotions, memory, and sleep. From the mother, however, a child inherits the genes that develop the cerebral cortex. Simply put, the child inherits intellectual potential from the mother, and emotions from the father..." (Maria Klimenko, [10, 11]). Thus, in shaping the potential of the young generation, who determine the progress of society, the role of women is indispensable. In the novel, the reader witnesses the attitude toward women's education and upbringing, which evokes both amazement and compassion. Such painful realities, expressed in the story, make any reader shudder and reflect deeply. Ultimately, the novel concludes that all misfortunes, violations of human rights, and the disregard of women's role in the family and society stem from ignorance. Where knowledge is absent, the norms of morality and measures of enlightenment collapse. People's destinies and the future of the nation end up in the hands of the ignorant. It is well known that educated and enlightened women are vital subjects of societal progress. The enlightenment of women is one of the main indicators of a society's status, for it is women who bring future generations into the world and raise them as mature individuals. Therefore, if we do not raise our daughters to be educated, knowledgeable, and qualified specialists in the professions they love, we will never be able to nurture enlightened women who meet the needs of society. As

scholar Abdulhamid ibn Badis said: “If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. If you educate a girl, you educate an entire society” [3, 17].

Thus, regardless of era, place, time, nation, or ethnicity, if women are enlightened, the future of that land will also be powerful, its destiny elevated, and its people will gain the opportunity to live prosperously. The children, in turn, will mature on the basis of moral values, be nourished by the spring of enlightenment, and serve for the well-being of their homeland.

The novel's heroine, Mariam, strives with patience to endure the trials, hardships, and indignities that are almost unbearable for a human being. The way such attitudes toward women are depicted pierces the human heart. How is it possible that women and mothers could be treated so shamefully, their fate and destiny sealed at the hands of despicable, narrow-minded people, mired in the swamp of corruption? Seeing women treated as objects, not as human beings, ignites sparks of hatred in the depths of one's soul. As the English writer Virginia Woolf put it: “There is no gauge to measure a woman's potential. There is no mold to measure a mother's tenderness, a daughter's devotion, the sincerity of sisters, or the selflessness of a housewife” [6, 148]. Mariam was just such a devoted woman to her family and her husband. However, her husband's inability to see this devotion only proved his own spiritual poverty.

Mariam's mother (Nana), speaking of women's fate, said: “Remember this, my daughter! Men have always blamed women. And it will always remain so. Do not forget it” [8, 10]. These words stayed in Mariam's memory and in the depths of her heart until her last breath. She grew up and matured under their shadow. Over the course of her life, she came to realize how true those words were and became further convinced that her mother had spoken rightly.

Not long after her mother's death, Mariam's stepmothers, wishing to get rid of her, conspired with her father Jalil to marry her off to Rashid, a shoemaker thirty years older than she. Through such episodes, the novel skillfully portrays how in Afghanistan marrying off underage girls has become a common custom, and how women are subjected to violence, oppression, and the violation of their rights. The author condemns the practice of marrying off underage girls and calls for its prevention.

Mariam had just turned 15, while the groom her father intended for her—Rashid—was already approaching 45. The writer conveys the age gap to the reader in this way: “But he's much older than you,” said Afsoon. “He's... around forty. At most, forty-five. Tell me, Nargis?—Yes, in our time, even nine-year-old girls were

given away to men over sixty. We've seen many like that. How old are you now? Fifteen? The very age to marry!” [8, 38]. In another instance, from Rashid's own words when he wanted to take Laila as his wife, we learn the girl's age: “She's very young, isn't she? Fourteen already. So, she's no longer a child. How old were you, Mariam? Fifteen? My mother gave birth to me at fourteen. So, she must have married at thirteen!—I... I don't want to!—Mariam sobbed breathlessly.—Don't interfere!—I'm too old now...—Yes, you are too old. She is very young” [8, 131].

The writer describes with compassion the fate of girls whose childhood and innocence have not yet fully faded, whose dreams are boundless, and whose nature has not yet hardened enough to withstand the blows of life. He condemns such situations and instills in the reader feelings of hatred toward those who lack moral and ethical qualities. When scholar Viktor Alimasov wrote: “The joy of life lies in suffering, the meaning of life is in caring for someone, and the happiness of life is in devoting yourself to something” [7, 199], it would not be surprising if he had Mariam's fate in mind. Mariam had devoted her entire being to her family and husband. She had learned everything from her husband's favorite dishes to anticipating his every wish and how to treat him. But did her husband know Mariam's desires? Was he aware of the storms raging in her heart? Sadly, he treated her not as a wife and partner but as an object. Sometimes, he even seemed to forget that Mariam lived in his household. This is deeply painful to witness. One begins to ask oneself: how can a human being be so narrow-minded and vile? Is there truly no other way? Could a woman deserve such treatment? These thoughts leave one restless.

Like all women, Mariam longed to have her own child, to feel the warmth of a baby in her arms, to see its innocent gaze and hear its laughter. The happiest and most blissful moments for a woman are those in which she nurtures her child's growth. There can be no greater happiness for a woman. Yet Mariam's dreams gradually turned into a painful longing. The main reason her dreams became a mirage was her early marriage; she was not yet mature enough for motherhood, her body had not completed its development. Fate deprived her of this supreme blessing. Later, when Laila's daughter Aziza came into her life, staying always by her side and spending time with her, Mariam's inner wounds eased, at least a little. Mariam gave all her love to Aziza.

At the end of the novel, Mariam grants Aziza the happiness she herself never achieved. This, too, reflects a belief that brighter days will come to Afghanistan, that children deserving of childhood will one day grow up there. As member of the Union of Writers of

Uzbekistan Muhabbat Yo'ldosheva emphasized: "This novel is a depiction of life's truth on paper. It not only reveals the horrors of war but also constantly reminds us of how great a blessing peace is for humanity, and how dearly its loss can cost" [8, 5].

In Khaled Hosseini's view, the fate of Afghan women of all ages is revealed through a feminist perspective in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Through the images of three generations of women—Aziza, the little girl; Laila, the middle-aged woman; and Mariam, the older woman—the writer illustrates that an unhealthy environment dominates every age group in Afghanistan. Observing the fate of women, the reader becomes aware of destinies in which women are not valued as human beings, their hopes for tomorrow extinguished, their rights and responsibilities trampled. Yet the novel also points to the importance of not succumbing to despair, of believing in the endurance of good deeds, and of hoping for brighter days. Looking to the future with optimism, the writer grieves over the humiliating treatment of women and calls on everyone to treat them with respect and reverence.

In addition, through his novel, the writer concludes that the main cause of the endless wars shaking the whole world, spilling innocent blood, and serving the interests of small groups lies in the abandonment of education. He emphasizes that the only solution is a return to education. Thus, among generations where education and upbringing are placed first, only a tendency toward development will emerge.

Today, efforts around the world are rapidly advancing to improve women's conditions, raise their legal, cultural, and everyday living standards, and ensure that girls receive regular schooling. From the examples mentioned, it can be concluded that discriminatory and humiliating laws and rules that demean women and trample their dignity—emerging in ancient times—have continued for centuries and, in some countries, still persist today.

It should be emphasized that a woman who is capable of reflection and sound judgment can provide her children with proper, wise, and fair upbringing. At the same time, by raising mentally, spiritually, and physically healthy children, she contributes significantly to the development of the country in which she lives. Literature, rightfully, is able to address such problems and help in finding their solutions.

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