



Dissection of Psyche and the Psycho social Stressors: A Psycho Realistic Study on Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

J. Valan Anusha & Stephen Foster Davis

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar (Reg. No.241131602035), Department of English, Scott Christian College (A), Nagercoil
Affiliated to Manomaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

²Associate Professor, Department of English, Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil
Affiliated to Manomaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu



Open Access

Manuscript ID: BIJ-2025-ES-030

Subject: English

Received : 26.08.2025

Accepted : 09.09.2025

Published : 31.12.2025

DOI:10.64938/bijsi.v10si4.25.Dec030

Copy Right:



This work is licensed under
a Creative Commons Attribution-
ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Abstract

This paper entitled "Dissection of Psyche and the Psycho social Stressors: A Psycho realistic Study on Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns" studies the Psyche of the characters which stands for the mind functioning as the centre of thought, emotion and behaviour and consciously or unconsciously adjusting or mediating the body's responses to the social and physical environment. It delves on the internal lives of the characters using the theory Psychological Realism which lent to the text through a focus on the thoughts and motivations of the characters rather than on the occupations and external settings. It portrays how through an in-depth understanding of the human mind and personality the author hopes to make the world depicted in the novel realistic, meaningful and enriching. This paper studies the different social stressors and the discernment of grounds for such differences in their inner selves through the concepts of Psychological realism and Psycho analysis.

Keywords: psyche, psychology, psycho analysis, realism and social milieu

Psychological realism makes the readers associate themselves with the characters and their feelings. It does not focus on setting their internal thoughts which lead them to the action, the external stimuli which force them to and how the social realism affects them and how it leads to the concluding action. Psychological realism talks about the perspective of the characters in the novel. The characters' own point of view in their every struggles and trauma they face is explained to the readers to make them feel and realize the individuals' plights and agonies in their journeys. As Debasish Sen states in Psychological Realism in 19th Century Fiction:

Studies in Turgenev, Tolstoy, Eliot and Bronte: "To understand the story from the perspective of the protagonist, be able to take a sensitive view of the creature's life story and conditions and emphasize with its circumstances" (3,4).

The individuals' mental journey, their reaction to the surroundings and their evolution from these experiences comes under psychological realism. As Debasish Sen states Caro Clarke's statement in Psychological Realism in 19th Century Fiction: Studies in Turgenev, Tolstoy, Eliot and Bronte:

You have to show the characters acting, and show why they are acting, or else the story isn't a story,



*it's just one damn thing after another. 'I, Huck Finn, ran away from home and then I did this and then I did that and then I headed west' But that's not why we read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. We read it to share Huck's inner adventure, how he responds to moral and physical tests. We see him change and grow strong by the choices he makes.*

(qtd. in Sen 12)

Psychological fiction has been found in the earlier work of Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* or *Genji Monogatari* which was written at the start of the 11th century, world's first psychological novel. As Debashish Sen states, Mason and Caiger comment regarding *The Tale of Genji*,

*Quite apart from its content, the *Tale of Genji* is significant as perhaps the mature novel ever written. Earlier "novels" had too closely resembled fairytales, or else were realistic but had no feeling for the complexity and capacity for development of their characters. Murasaki Shikibu's book, though imaginative fiction, is both descriptively and psychologically true to life. It deals with society as it was and people as they are.*

(qtd. in Sen 14)

The first psychological novel to be written in the west is Giovanni Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* in 1344. In 17th century, Madame De La Fayette's *The Princess of Cleves*, is an example of quintessential psychological novel. In 18th century, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa: The History of a Young Lady* is also an example for psychological realism. Many psychological novels gave rise to the different techniques called Stream of Consciousness, Interior Monologue, psycho narration and narrated monologue. The notable writers who followed these techniques are Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. In the literature of the United States, Henry James, Patrick McGrath, Arthur Miller and Edith Warton have contributed to follow psychological realism. Psychoanalysis has become a dominating part in early field of Psychology. Freud's idea on the structures of mind which talks about Id, Ego and Superego and also the conscious and unconscious mind take a major role in the field of psychology. Other contributors of

theory of psychology are B. F. Skinner, Jean Piaget, Wilhelm Wundt, Carl Rogers and William James.

Khaled Hosseini can be considered as a psychological realist as he gives the perspective of every character not focusing on good versus bad but on circumstances which induce them to do it and the surroundings in which they have been raised. This is the external factors acting upon them. When we look into the characterization of Jalil, we see a man shunning his illegitimate daughter because he is ashamed of the society and his own family. Though he loved Mariam, his mistakes troubled him and he lost his courage to stand for his daughter when Jalil's wives decided for Mariam's marriage at a very young age. Here one can find the male psychology that is afraid of embarrassments and that diffuses responsibility which leads to anonymity as they focus on abandoning the mistakes they have done which in the novel is Mariam, the result of Jalil's mistake. Wilbur S. Scott rightly states the Freudian idea in *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*: "a scientific terminology by which to interpret man's bondage... to the repressions society forced upon him" (69).

Environment and surroundings play an important part in one's life. The unconscious repressions, acts, habits have always been based on the influences one receive from the surroundings. In this novel, the character Rasheed, having born in a patriarchal social set up strictly follows the patriarchal norms, that man should have control over woman. He vehemently condemns the men who treat women equally as men. "They think nothing of a stranger touching their wives' bare feet! They think they're being modern men, intellectuals, on account of their education, I suppose. They don't see that they're spoiling their own nang and namoos, their honor and pride.... It embarrasses me, frankly, to see a man who's lost control of his wife" (69). These lines suggest his unconscious oppression towards women and the men centered view of Rasheed, who thinks men should subjugate women.

In a patriarchal society, where people are under the impression that men are powerful than women, unconsciously inject the same to their children. The children who are brought up with that idea think that men are superior to women and disregard women. They develop the mindset of making women



submissive to them because they think that women belong to kitchen and have the duty of taking care of their husbands and not for achieving what they want and what they like. In this novel, the victims to Rasheed's patriarchial mindset are Mariam and Laila. Laila is forced by Rasheed in marrying him. She had no choice but to marry him because of Tariq's child she was bearing in her womb. Laila's experience at her home is totally different from the experience she has faced in Rasheed's home. Hakim, Laila's father gave prominence to women's education as he himself was a teacher. He gave full liberty a woman should need in order to achieve her goals.

Hakim's way of seeing things is different from that of Rasheed's. Rasheed points Hakim as a "modern man" who doesn't know how to control his wife. This shows Rasheed is fully adapted to the male chauvinistic society. He can be considered as "man is sick rather than villainous" (Scott 69).

Man is influenced by the society and reflects who he is by the situation he faces in the society. The author has brought two different views of men about women. Hakim often talks about women's emancipation and Rasheed gets proud in seeing women being submissive. He also takes proud in calling Mariam "harami". This can be analyzed under the misconception of men that society teaches the stereotype of women who should be serving men. Their psyche is made up in such a way that whoever breaks these barriers cannot be considered as women but hoes and whoever cannot control these women cannot be considered as men as Rasheed sees Hakim who enjoys women liberation. "Laila remembered Mammy telling Babi once that she had married a man who had no convictions" (149).

The caliber of their psyche can also be viewed under the ethnicities, religion they belong and the traditions they follow. While analyzing the cultural evolution of Afghanistan as noted in this book, it is considered as a primitive nation as noted by the author. It has to be noted that when the Talibans seized Kabul, the set of rules which is given in the form of flyers itself show the psyche of men who are inculcated and influenced about the way of treating women like polygamy followed by the afghan men and the Talibans who set an example to their followers and other Afhan men about having right to harass women and commit crimes

This view of men's psychology can be supported by Wilbur S. Scott's statement in Five Approaches of Literary Criticism: "One branch of psychological criticism deals with the unconscious not of the individual writer or character, but of the race or culture" (71). One's race or culture unconsciously determines one's mindset or mentality in seeing things differently. This influence on Rasheed is also seen in Zalmai. Their legacy continues because of Rasheed's son who sees things similarly as shown by Rasheed. He sees things in the eyes of Rasheed. Zalmai loves his father the most. He loves to spend time with Rasheed more than Mariam and Laila. He is dedicated to his father and does not think about being apart from his father. He has seen Rasheed torturing, smacking both Mariam and Laila though he has concern for them. He never objects his father's decision. He supports Rasheed in everything he does because he has the mindset that what father does is right and always be right. When Tariq visits Laila after a very long time, we see Zalmai being faithful to his father. He is boy of two and he knows Rasheed beats both Mariam and Laila to death if he reveals the truth but still he reveals because of his love for him. Thus we see Zalmai following Rasheed and stands by him and for him, "She was . . . She was downstairs, talking to that man" (333).

One can associate this childhood growth to that of what Freud says about super ego in structure of human mind. It says that superego is always concerned with social rules and morals more like conscience as generally people say. It develops as a child learns what their culture considers right and wrong. Rasheed's social rules are right according to him. He does not feel a sense of remorse or shame to think women are to be suppressed because of the way he has been raised in the society which is filled with toxic masculinity.

Every man's personality and behaviour are shaped by the series of social expectations, his reaction to the social milieu and thereby its effects in the child from its childhood till the period of development. Same is with the case of Mariam, who is often abused by her mother, thinks of every possible ways to live with her father Jalil. She does not listen to her mother but after Jalil gives up on her, and when she returns to her mother she sees



her mother has hanged herself to death. She feels guilty and tortures herself that she is responsible for her mother's death saying to herself that if she had listened to her mother and stayed with her, she would not have killed herself and her mother would have been alive by now. She completely understands what her mother says after she has been married to Rasheed. She fathoms what it feels to be alone and ignored as she is isolated and berated by Rasheed. We can connect her sense of guilty with what Freud has talked about the structures of mind. Her super ego brings the sense of remorse and woes throughout her life. She is reminded of her guilt every time she faces isolation and sadness. "I keep thinking of what she said to me before I left. I shouldn't have left her. I should have" (43).

In the concluding part where she kills Rasheed in order to protect Laila, one can find her guilty feeling at first: "I've killed our husband. I've deprived your son of his father. It isn't right that I run. I can't even if they never catch us, I'll never..." (349). In psychological view point, it is analysed that Mariam uses the defense mechanism of "Sublimation" as stated by Freud that she redirects her wrong doing into acceptable actions. According to her what she has done is right and she feels right but to the society she is guilty because she has murdered her husband. She even voluntarily surrenders herself to the officers and happily accepts the verdict of death penalty. It is because the previous remorse that she has for her mother has been torturing her from the beginning and also the relief that her end will bring happiness to Laila and her children. One's guilt doesn't end until one's death. "For me, it ends here. There's nothing more I want. Everything I'd ever wished for as a little girl you've already given me. You and your children have made me so very happy. It's all right, Lailajo. This is all right. Don't be sad. . . O my Lord! Forgive and have mercy, for you are the best of the merciful ones" (350, 361).

It can also be brought under "cathartic" for hysteria put forward by Freud's colleague Josef Breuer. It is a therapeutic technique. It talks about recalling their past traumatic experiences which are repressed for a very long time but unconsciously expressing their repressed emotions. It is also believed that they experience the sense of relief from

the stress. This novel presents Mariam's purgation of emotions, that is her repressed emotions when she sees Rasheed grabbing Laila's neck and is about to kill her. Her emotions are transferred into actions.

The consequences and the impacts faced by the people due to war are inexplicable. In this novel, Laila loses her family due to the explosion. Tariq and his family migrate themselves away from Kabul to escape themselves. Because of that Laila was left with none and had to seek refuge in Rasheed's house and finally was forced into marrying him. Thus Laila's happy life turned upside down due to the cold war. Poverty is another condition that left Laila to leave her daughter Aziza to Karteh-Seh, an orphanage because of unemployment. Starvation is at its height. There are no proper facilities in the hospital to treat people who suffered in war. "Even the snake bitten man finds sleep, but not the hungry" (299).

State of constant fear leads to depression and never brings peace. War destroys families and other communities. It leads to lot of physical and psychological illness to children and adults. However, no psycho social illness is explicitly emphasized in this novel but the effects of war on individuals and how it tortures them psychologically are clearly explained by Khaled Hosseini. Rather than resisting pain, and thereby creating suffering, it would be wise to learn to accept the authentic self. In doing this, one can develop self-acceptance and self-compassion.

Through this endeavour, Hosseini presents the human psyche that consciously or unconsciously adjusts or mediates to the social and physical environment. He has attempted to discover the strangled voice to articulate women's silent discourse, to demystify and deconstruct the myths. She has also made an effort to voice forth the woman's inner yearnings, strivings and aspiration to protest against the dehumanising tendencies of society by rejecting the opposition between masculine and feminine and by substituting them as elements that represent multiple differences.

Works Cited

1. Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.



2. Sen, Debasish. *Psychological Realism in the 19th Century Fiction: Studies in Turgenev, Tolstoy, Eliot and Bronte*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020.
3. Scott, Wilbur S. *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism: An Arrangement of Contemporary Critical Essays*. Collier Macmillen Publishers, 1974.
4. Cherry, Kendra. "The Role of Catharsis in Psychology." Verywellmind, Dotdash, 25 Jan. 2020. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-catharsis-2794968>.
5. "Psychodynamic Perspectives on Personality." Boundless Psychology, Lumen Learning, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-psychology/chapter/psychodynamic-perspectives-on-personality/>.