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Domestic Violence Against Women Portrayed in Khaled Hosseini's *a Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract

Gender inequality and violence against women are critically discussed by scholars around the world. Set in Afghanistan, a country that still adheres to a patriarchal culture, Khaled Hosseini, in his novel A Thousand Splendid Suns, depicts how the two main female characters, Meriam and Laila, have to face domestic violence in their polygamous marriage with Rasheed. This research aims to show how domestic violence is portrayed in the novel A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini and how the novel challenges domestic violence through the two main female characters, Mariam and Laila. The research used a qualitative method by utilizing the gender studies approach. Specifically, it used gender-based violence and domestic violence concept by Ganley. The result of the research shows that the two main female characters had to face three forms of domestic violence such as physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence; and the two female characters fight against Rasheed's behavior and they finally get different freedoms, both physically and psychologically. In conclusion, the two female characters in the novel tried to challenge the practice of domestic violence instead of silently confronting it like women are expected to do.

Keywords: *A Thousand Splendid Suns, Afghan Women, Domestic Violence, Gender Studies, Polygamy Marriage.*

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Introduction

Domestic violence is one of the most important issues that have to be faced by many people around the world. Domestic violence often results in death, injury, and sometimes even the victim chooses to commit suicide and mental health problems (Ganley, 2002). Domestic violence usually involves physical, sexual, and psychological assault. Domestic violence in Afghanistan, for instance, has a negative impact in several aspects, such as quality of life, social and physical health (Palwasha, 2021). The perpetrators of violence in Afghanistan are usually carried out by men (husbands) or mother-in-law (Ganley, 2002). Afghanistan is a country that implements a patriarchal system, where all institutions are ruled by men



(Syiva Fauzia & Cahyaning Rahayu, 2019). Most patriarchal men think a man should be the dominant, the leader and the powerful one to the point that oppressing women might be seen as not a negative thing. This behavior of oppressing women causes injustice experienced by many women.

Afghanistan has almost become a country that wants to give special attention to women (Roshan, 2019). However, the dreams of all women in Afghanistan have not yet been realized because now they have to give up living under pressure and humiliation. The arrival of the Soviets to Afghanistan resulted in a power struggle between various ethnicities and circles. The war in Afghanistan took a long time, causing deteriorating security for Afghan women. In the year that the Taliban emerged and took over, it was also then that women became targets for oppression, where they lost their freedom and security and were treated unfairly (Roshan, 2019). The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* describes Afghanistan as a country full of history and sticking to its culture. The lives of the Afghan people changed when there was a foreign invasion where the Soviet invasion and Taliban rule turned the Afghan people's lifestyle into unbearable and extreme anarchy (Zubair, 2021).

In the 1970s, the Taliban also managed to take over Kabul. These times were full of violence and suffering experienced by many women there. At the time, Afghan women experienced social injustice because they experienced illiteracy, dependence on men, death etc. (Salbi, 2015). Education is one of the prohibitions specifically for women. They are also required to cover their body from head to toe. They are even advised to wear the *burqa* when leaving the house (Roshan, 2019). The Taliban imposed various restrictions on women in Afghanistan, prohibiting them from going to school, working, travelling alone, and entering shops (Monish & Kannadhasan, 2021).

Violence experienced by women is an act of gender-based violence, and the side effects of this violence can be felt directly or indirectly. It was found in several studies that women are more prone to mental disorders than men (Golmakani & Azmoude, 2013). Women who experience domestic violence usually experience depression and excessive anxiety (Estefan et al., 2016) but fewer studies have examined the unique contributions of emotional abuse to mental health. This study explored the contextual relationships between the type and frequency of IPV, community factors, and emotional health. Data were collected from a community-based IPV intervention program. Logistic regression found an increased likelihood of depression for respondents who experienced emotional abuse more than once per week (odds ratio [OR] = 4.864). Gender-Based violence, abbreviated as GBV comes in various forms, such as domestic violence, sexual violence, torture, and psychological assault. If we look at the cases that have been mentioned, these acts of violence are in different forms, but the forms of violence that are imposed on women have the same goal, namely to enforce the impression of masculinity that can make the victim obedient. The violence that occurs against women is usually also supported by the surrounding environment, such as customs that have existed for a long time or the low protection of women in the area.

Gender inequality or sexual violence against women is a problem from the past until today that is still quite hotly discussed by people worldwide. Many advanced countries still treat women as weak and do not have the right to voice their hearts out. According to Wibben (2016), the fight for gender equality is the longest-running war, and those who fight for gender equality are considered feminists. Gender equality means the conditions of equality for men and women regarding opportunities and rights as human beings, to be able to contribute and participate in politics, economics, social, culture, national security, and equality in enjoying the results of development (Suacana, 2016). Feminism is a struggle to demand equality between men and women and against social discrimination (Fauzia & Rahayu, 2019). We can see that there are many developed countries and their smart people

currently. However, sexual violence or oppression of women still often occurs even if we are in such environments.

The essence of domestic violence is how men have a higher role or position than women. Afghanistan is an Islamic country that prioritizes Islamic traditions and laws in determining regulations; men are the main characters in domestic life. This obvious gender distinction limits women to the point that it is easy for men to take control of women's lives (Kristensen, 2016). Violence or discrimination against women is a long-standing discussion. If we discuss the violence experienced by women, it will be directly connected to the discussion of gender inequality, the feminist movement, and other discussions that support women. The environment, customs, and traditions of certain communities usually support the occurrence of domestic violence.

In some traditional beliefs, women are men's assets. Men have the power and authority to control life and physically punish women and children (Summers & Hoffman, 2002). The literary work and the real world are connected. Issues covered in literary works mostly come from the real world. Domestic violence is one of the issues from real life that is often discussed in literary works. Domestic violence that mostly happens to women in real life also happens to women in literary works because literary work can be considered a reflection of the real world we lived in.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a literary work written by Khaled Hosseini and managed to raise the issue of domestic violence. The novel was published in the United States on May 22, 2007. The novel tells the tortuous story of two women named Mariam and Laila. This novel is set in Afghanistan during the 1960-2000s war periods. During this time of war, the role of women in life was very disadvantaged. Mariam and Laila are forced to marry Rasheed, a shoemaker from Kabul. Unfortunately, both women have to experience various forms of violence in their marriage perpetrated by Rasheed, such as physical, psychological and sexual violence.

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini can be discussed with the notion of domestic violence. Various kinds of violence contained in the novel are studied using the theory of domestic violence proposed by Ganley (2002), so that it can help the researcher to classify the forms of violence and the side effects of the violence the two female characters went through. Domestic violence is experienced by women or men bound by sacred agreements. According to Ganley (2002), domestic violence is classified into several types, such as physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and economic violence. Thus, this study will explore the types of violence portrayed in the novel and how the two female characters fight for their rights as women. The purpose of this study is to see how Ganley's theory categorizes the attacks in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and prove that the two women resisted the violence they experienced.

There are two previous studies related to discussing the issues in the novel. The first study that discussed husband-to-wife aggression and the consequences of violent behavior against his wife in a novel entitled *Husband-to-wife aggression in A thousand splendid suns by Khaled Hosseini*, was conducted by Dasarath Neupane at Modi University in 2017. This study focuses on the types of aggression Rasheed does toward his wives and explains the husband's aggression towards his wife. The second research is the impact of oppression toward women seen through two women characters in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* conducted by Stefani Amanda Anggi Riany at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta in 2017. This study focuses on the oppression experienced by the two female characters in the novel and what are the aftermaths of the oppression. Another study that examined domestic violence is Yuliana, et al (2020). They study the domestic violence towards women characters, as seen in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, by using subaltern

theory by Gayatri Spivak and domestic violence theory by Ganley.

Both studies by Neupane (2017) and Riany (2017) only examined how the two female characters, Mariam and Laila, were oppressed by their husbands. They have not discussed yet how these women, Mariam and Laila fight against the oppression. While the study conducted by Yuliana, et al (2020) only focused on how women characters in the *Bluest Eye* suffered from domestic violence without exploring how those women fight back against the oppression. Therefore, this research aims to show how domestic violence is portrayed in the novel entitled *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and how the novel challenges domestic violence through the two main female characters, Mariam and Laila.

Method

This study uses a qualitative method to analyze deeply about domestic violence. Qualitative research is research in the form of descriptive, where the researcher collects information in the form of words or pictures, which does not prioritize numbers (Sugiyono, 2019). This method is used to describe the kind of violence that happens in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Ganley's concept of domestic violence helps this study to examine the violence depicted and experienced by the two female characters in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. To support the analysis, this study used previous related studies to engage with the issues. Thus, this research is also categorized as library research. Library research is used for collecting data. According to Sugiyono (2019), library research is still directly related to the study of theories and references that cannot be separated from the scientific literature.

This study is included in the gender studies approach and particularly used gender-based violence. GBV is a term used for violence involving gender elements such as domestic violence, forced marriage, human trafficking, and other forms of harassment and physical violence (Hynes & Cardozo, 2000). The data is gathered from the narratives and the dialogues in the novel that contains evidences of domestic violence experienced by the two main female characters. The researchers then categorize the data based on Ganley (2002) into various forms of violence, such as physical, psychological, and sexual. After collecting the results of the narration and dialogue, the researcher will group the forms of violence into categories. This study describes domestic violence and its various types based on Ganley's concept. It discusses how the two women in the novel are trying to find a better life during the war in Afghanistan and discrimination against women. The data that has been collected will be analyzed by using a descriptive qualitative method. There are steps in analyzing the data, such as: Classifying the data of the research, narrations, and dialogues from the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to be analyzed further, closely engaging with the concept of domestic violence by Ganley to analyze the data, explaining the process of how domestic violence is depicted in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and conclude the data analysis that has been done in this research.

Result and Discussion

This study found that the two main female characters, Mariam and Laila, in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini experienced domestic violence from their husband, Rasheed. They are in a polygamous marriage with an abusive, oppressive and dominant husband. Mariam and Laila received physical, psychological and sexual violence in different forms, which will be explained in the following points. In addition, this study also found that the two women not only resigned themselves to accepting all forms of violence but also made several efforts to resist the violence they received from their husbands.

Domestic Violence: Physical, Psychological, and Sexual

Domestic violence in the novel is faced by the two main female characters, Mariam and

Laila. Moreover, this part will elaborate on how domestic violence is depicted and what types of domestic violence the characters Mariam and Laila face in the novel. Thus, the certain types of domestic violence the main female characters face will be elaborated below.

Physical violence is dangerous physical contact, such as beatings, domestic violence, rape, and threats of assault. All physical attacks can harm and leave physical injuries to the victim (Simon-Butler & McSherry, 2018). Physical violence can also disturb the mentality of someone who experiences it, such as trauma to certain circumstances or items that have hurt them. As one of the novel's main female characters, Mariam was physically abused by Rasheed.

His powerful hands clasped her jaw. He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, the forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in. his upper lip curled in a sneer. "Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food and nothing". (Hosseini, 2018, pp. 102–103)

From the narration and conversation above, violence occurred when Mariam served Rasheed food. The sentence "His powerful hands clasped her jaw" proves that Rasheed has physically abused Mariam, as well as the sentence "the forced the cold, hard pebbles into it" Rasheed uses pebbles as an illustration of how Mariam cooks for Rasheed and the forced pebbles entered Mariam's mouth causing Mariam's graham teeth to break. Her mouth filled with sand, gravel, and blood.

Rasheed's behavior like this clearly illustrates that Rasheed is a husband who will resort to violence if something is not as he wants. If something like the evidence above happens in the household, Rasheed does not hesitate to give them the appropriate punishment. Household masters had the legal authority to order their wives and children's submission, as well as the obedience of any servants or slaves, and to use physical punishment to correct disobedience (Cott, 2009). Thus, Rasheed, the master of the house, can easily order his wives to cook and serve him the food. However, if the cooking does not suit him, he can also punish them because he thinks he has the right to punish his wives, whom he sees as his subordinates and people below him.

Rasheed grabbed Laila by the elbow and pushed her up the steps. Then she was being dragged by the hair. Hair was ripped from Laila's scalp, and her eyes watered with pain. (Hosseini, 2018, p. 261)

The violence seen from the narration above happens when the escape plan that Laila and Mariam had been discussing for a long time fails because the soldiers find out when they are about to board the bus. The Taliban, who have taken control of Afghanistan, are now giving harsh rules to women. The Taliban forbade women to travel alone and to leave the house alone without a *mahram* (Agustina & Ramalia, 2017). Even women there can be said to have committed crimes when caught running away from home. Laila and Mariam are returned to their house because Rasheed already knows of their escape plan. The narration above shows that Rasheed's anger explodes, and Laila, who became his favorite wife, is now treated the same as Mariam. The violence that Rasheed committed was physical violence because his actions caused wounds and bleeding. Laila's hair was pulled forcibly until it broke, causing her scalp to bleed.

Rasheed was home almost every day. He slapped Aziza. He kicked Mariam. He threw things. He found fault with Laila, the way she smelled, the way she dressed, the way she combed her hair, her yellowing teeth.
(Hosseini, 2018, p. 297)

The war experienced by Afghanistan had a very large effect on the lives of the surrounding community; not only women but even children also received forms of violence from their parents and those around them. Violence directed at children is usually caused by poverty, lack of education and war in the area (Cameron et al., 2018). In the narrative above, the violence experienced by Mariam, Laila, and Aziza occurred when Rasheed's shop burned down with other shops due to the negligence of a cloth merchant. His presence at home made him complain about many things. Besides that, he also took all his anger out on people at home. The violence that Rasheed used to do to Mariam and Laila, now he also did it to his daughter Aziza who at that time was too young to accept an act of violence from a father. From the problem above, it can be concluded that Rasheed committed violence against Aziza to vent his anger because he no longer has a job and poverty is already in front of their eyes.

Sexual activity is usually carried out by two people who love each other. It can be said to be sexual violence if one feels uncomfortable or harmed during sex. Simon-Butler & McSherry (2018) explain that the Secretary-General of the United Nations prefers to use the word 'sexual exploitation' over sexual violence. Sexual exploiters are people who take advantage of the sexual exploitation of others in various ways. This is a condition where the perpetrator promises things the victim cannot afford and asks for sexual rewards. This sexual violence is discriminatory because the victim will suffer before, during, and after the conflict.

There was a moment of hesitation, and then his hand was on her neck, his thick fingers slowly pressing the knobs in the back of it. His thumb slid down, and now it was stroking the hollow above her collarbone, then the flesh beneath it. Mariam began shivering. His hand crept lower still, lower, his fingernails catching in the cotton of her blouse.
"I can't" she croaked, looking at his moonlit profile, his thick shoulders, and broad chest, the tufts of gray hair protruding from his open collar.
(Hosseini, 2018, p. 75)

The narrative and conversation above took place before Mariam had a miscarriage. In the narration above, it can be seen that that night Mariam refused to have sex with Rasheed, but Rasheed did not listen to Mariam's decision. Rasheed continued doing what he wanted when he entered Mariam's room. It can be seen that that night only one person wanted to have sex, which is a decision that can be said to be coercive. Before leaving Mariam, Rasheed said that "it is what married people do. It is what the Prophet himself and his wives did. there is no shame" (Hosseini, 2018, p. 76). Rasheed uses our Prophet as an alibi for what he did to Mariam. In fact, our Prophet Muhammad SAW never taught his people to have intercourse in a forced state. Rasheed also believes that women should follow their words and serve their husbands well. This action is also supported by the Taliban government, which makes women live quite a miserable life (Zafarzai & Amiri, 2021) without assent of the respondent/ victim. In assault, the perpetrator misuses his position, circumstances or intimidation to soothe his craving. Afghanistan faces a political conflict for

decades internally as well as externally. This prolonged political instability creates enormous number of problems for Afghanistan and sexual assault is one of them. Current study was conducted in year 2019 to find out the types and consequences (clinical and psychological).

He ate, smoked, went to bed, sometimes came back in the middle of the night for a brief and, of late, quite rough session of coupling. (Hosseini, 2018, p. 93)

Starting from their sexual life, Rasheed treats Mariam roughly when they have sex. Sexual violence is an act that violates the norms and values contained in humanity. When a person is forced to do things that arouse their sexuality or have sex that makes one feel disadvantaged, the act can already be termed as 'sexual violence'. The sentence "sometimes came back in the middle of the night for a brief and, of late, a quite rough session of coupling" states that Rasheed committed violence in having sex with Mariam. Rasheed's violence occurred after Mariam had a miscarriage.

Sexual violence by men is connected to regulation by the distorted religion. Men use religion as an excuse to get what they want, having sex with their partner without even asking for their consent. Religion has an important role in Afghan society because all the government's regulations must be based on the existing religion and Islamic law. Knowing that the Taliban made inhuman and brutal regulations in the name of Islam so that the Afghan people could accept these regulations. These regulations harm women a lot, such as being required to wear the *burqa*, not being allowed to leave the house alone, not being educated and not allowing women to make decisions (Yeasmin, 2020). These regulations make it very easy for women to be oppressed and ostracized by men, so rape, humiliation, and abuse are unavoidable.

Psychological violence can also be considered as verbal violence, usually by conveying offensive comments, and insults, and even many who carry out sexual harassment verbally, such as asking for sex with unknown people and using sex as a joke. Verbal harassment is where the perpetrator uses language that can hurt another person, usually hurting emotionally or psychologically (Roshaan, 2018). The violence that attacks psychology has several forms. Perpetrators will use various tactics so that the victim follows his wishes; these various tactics are not necessarily all experienced by the victim (Ganley, 2002).

"You know nothing, do you? You're like a child. Your brain is empty. There is no information in it" (Hosseini, 2018, p. 97)

The conversation above illustrates that Rasheed is tired of answering Mariam's questions which he thinks are basic knowledge. The sentence 'Your brain is empty' is an insult that Rasheed wrapped with sarcasm. Before the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and made it a rule that girls were not allowed to receive an education (Lone et al., 2018), Mariam had never received a school education. Mariam is only allowed to learn the Qur'an, and even her parents never tell how a child's life is when he goes to school.

In fact, Rasheed had known that Mariam was a girl who had never been to school since childhood. Rasheed's words that insulted Mariam became evidence that Rasheed had committed violence which also disturbed Mariam's psychology. Rasheed's indirect statement tells that Mariam is stupid to the point it makes Mariam not confident enough and chooses to tolerate all of Rasheed's humiliations toward her. That happens because Mariam's fear towards Rasheed is bigger than her confidence.

"Get off my heels!" he snapped, making a shooting motion with his gun. "Stop following me! And you can stop twirling your wrist like that. I'm

not picking you up. Go on! Go on before you get stepped on.” (Hosseini, 2018, p. 248)

Violence against children is also common in Afghanistan. Home is one of the most likely places for parental violence to occur. Parents use violence as a method to discipline their children; in fact, no research reveals that this method successfully makes children disciplined. Violence received by children leaves more marks and a bad impression on children's lives in the future (O'Leary et al., 2018). The words above are a form of threat that makes Aziza afraid when dealing with Rasheed. After hearing Rasheed's anger, Aziza, scared and confused, decided to walk away and head towards Mariam. The words 'Go on before you get stepped on' were a physical threat that Rasheed threw at his daughter.

Rasheed shoved the children aside, pushed Laila to the ground, and began kicking her. Mariam threw herself on Laila. He went on kicking, kicking Mariam now, spittle flying from his mouth, his eyes glittering with murderous intent, kicking until he couldn't anymore. "I swear you're going to make me kill you, Laila," he said, panting. Then he stormed out of the house.” (Hosseini, 2018, p. 298)

This narrative occurs when Rasheed has experienced misfortune and has been fired from his place of work many times. Rasheed does not accept being fired and goes home angry and tells what happened. Mariam did not believe Rasheed's story and chose to remain silent, which is in contrast to Laila, who boldly gave answers that intentionally offended Rasheed. Without everyone knowing, Rasheed was already on top of Laila. The narration and dialogue above show that Rasheed has done physical abuse and has given a treat towards the victim so she would stop trying to fight him back. Rasheed resorted to relentless violence until he had had enough and threatened to kill Laila.

As Ganley (2002) has said, there are different forms of psychological violence. In this narrative, Rasheed uses threats as violence to get Laila to stop doing things against what Rasheed wants. The sentence "make me kill you, Laila" will make the victims stop fighting for their own safety so that the perpetrator will feel victorious because they can control the victim's behavior. The threat of physical violence by perpetrators of violence becomes a psychological control where the perpetrator uses tactics to control the victim as criminals do when they take people hostage (Ganley, 2002). This narrative can also prove that Rasheed was physically and psychologically violent. Physical violence that occurs in the narrative above is kicking and pushing.

The violence in Afghanistan occurred because of the Soviet invasion, and the rule of the Taliban made Afghanistan follow the rules they had made because the Taliban used the name of Islam and tradition to create inhumane regulations (Zafarzai & Amiri, 2021) without the assent of the respondent/ victim. In assault, the perpetrator misuses his position, circumstances or intimidation to soothe his craving. Afghanistan faces a political conflict for decades internally as well as externally. This prolonged political instability creates enormous number of problems for Afghanistan and sexual assault is one of them. Current study was conducted in year 2019 to find out the types and consequences (clinical and psychological). Women are not allowed to leave the house alone and must wear a *burqa* if they want to leave the house. Every form of violence will have side effects on the victim. Mariam became a coward when Rasheed was at home. Mariam became the most careful person so as not to make the slightest mistake. Meanwhile, Laila experiences various nightmares when they no longer live in Kabul. The disturbance that Mariam and Laila experienced was caused by their lives full of insults and acts of violence, so psychologically, they became women who were

too careful.

Mariam and Laila in Challenging Domestic Violence

The way the two main female characters in the novel, Mariam and Laila, challenge the notion of domestic violence will be discussed further. In this second discussion, two sub-chapters will discuss two female characters in detail. These two sub-chapters will describe how they responded to the violence, whether they fought back during the persecution or chose to remain silent and what kind of freedom they got after surviving and fighting for their rights as women and mothers.

This novel's main character is Mariam, Rasheed's first wife. Her marriage to Rasheed was a very scary thing in Mariam's life. Doing a marriage forced by parents is not an easy thing to go through. After her mother's departure, Mariam was forced to marry by her father and stepmother to Rasheed. Mariam's existence is unwanted in the family. Like it or not, Mariam had to keep doing the marriage. So here is Mariam now. Living with a man who every day commits violence against her. The violence began when Mariam miscarried while pregnant and that incident changed Rasheed's behavior towards Mariam.

Now Mariam dreaded the sound of him coming home in the evening.
(Hosseini, 2018, p. 98)

The sentence above shows that all the abusive behavior Mariam has to face creates fears of her own within her mind. The occurrence of war and accepting various forms of violence, traumatized the victim (Lone et al., 2018). Mariam always tried not to make any mistakes that would trigger Rasheed's emotions when he came home from work. Rasheed's violence made him seem to dominate their domestic life. Rasheed was a strong man, and Mariam became an obedient wife to protect herself from Rasheed's violent attacks. Mariam never once resisted Rasheed's wishes. In fact, she always tried to make everything in the house look perfect to her husband. Until one day, a bomb fell near his house, killing two parents and one injured daughter, namely Laila. Laila's arrival brings a ray of light to Mariam's life.

Since the first time Rasheed had abused Mariam, she had never retaliated or even fought back. It was not Mariam's resistance to Rasheed, but she introspected herself and thought 'where did she go wrong when Rasheed abused her'. For years Mariam did not fight back and chose to submit to Rasheed. Until one day, Mariam agreed to someone's invitation to run away from the house to Peshawar secretly. The plan did not go smoothly, which caused a great commotion in the house. Punches, kicks, and insults are inevitable on that day.

Mariam clawed at him. She beat his chest. She hurled herself against him. she struggled to uncurl his fingers from Laila's neck. she bit them. but they remained tightly clamped around Laila's windpipe, and Mariam saw that he meant to carry this through. (Hosseini, 2018, p. 339)

The narrative above occurs when Laila meets Tariq at her house, and Mariam helps distract Zalmai by playing in her room. They were working together so Zalmai would not find out and not complain to Rasheed when Laila met Tariq at his house, which made him very angry. Seeing Rasheed strangle Laila until her face turned blue made Mariam put up a fight against Rasheed. Being aware of being in the same condition as someone makes them decide to be together to survive and strengthen each other (Sebastian, 2016). The narrative above proves that Mariam and Laila are starting to feel that they need each other, so they will subconsciously protect each other.

Laila's arrival in Mariam's life made her dare to give resistance to her husband. Mariam's indecision against Rasheed certainly had a reason. Mariam realized she was just a harami and grew up in a small town called Kabul with her mother, Nana, who chose to commit suicide. Since a child, Mariam has never experienced the world of education. She only ever recited the Qur'an with her teacher named, Mullah Faizullah. Mariam realized that she did not have any provisions for her life. That was why she chose to remain silent when Rasheed treated her unfairly. However, Laila's arrival taught her how it feels to be wanted by someone and how nice it is to have friends talking at home. The presence of Aziza and Zalmai also made her understand what it feels like to love and be loved by someone.

And, with that, Mariam brought down the shovel. This time, she gave it everything she had. (Hosseini, 2018, pp. 340–341)

The commotion that occurred after Laila was caught meeting Tariq was the biggest and last commotion for Mariam and Laila. In the end, Mariam had the opportunity to decide for her life. The narrative above states that Mariam chose to end Rasheed's life with her own hands with a shovel she took from the tool shed. At that time, Mariam was faced with two choices in her life. First, let Rasheed kill her, which is certain that Laila, who was unconscious by then, will also be killed; or Mariam kills Rasheed then Laila and her children can continue a better life. No one else saw when Mariam decided to kill her husband, who had committed various kinds of violence against her.

This courage appears when Mariam considers Laila as her child. Mariam thought about how Aziza and Zalmai would live if Laila was not around. Apart from defending herself, Mariam took this decision to save Laila. For her, Laila and her children are the most important things in Mariam's life. Freedom is one of Mariam's desires. According to Mariam, "freedom" has many meanings. Mariam is free from the house, which for her is like hell on earth, Mariam is free from the violence and threats that she usually hears from her husband's words. Mariam was emotionally free. Emotional freedom is enough for her because she must accept the punishment for what she has done after this. Mariam becomes a suspect in Rasheed's death. Kabul holds the law that life must be paid for by life, so Mariam's punishment was the death penalty.

In the middle of the story, Laila becomes an important character in the novel. Laila is a child who was born into a good family and prioritized education. At that time, Laila was known as a quite smart girl in the education field. She dreamed of becoming an independent woman and a better environment. Laila has several friends at school. They also often walk together when they come home from school. However, there is one boy who is her close friend, Tariq. In the end, they had to separate because Tariq had to leave Afghanistan for the sake of his father's recovery.

When the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, the punishment was common. Whips, use of pistols and launching of rockets that often land not where they are meant to be (Lone et al., 2018). When they are ready to leave and put things in the car in the morning, the rocket destroys Laila's life and dreams. Laila suffered injuries to her body while her father and mother were certain that they were dead. Laila was raised by Mariam and Rasheed, who was Laila's neighbours and saw the incident. Of course, living with Rasheed was not easy. Rasheed does not want to give food and help to people for free, so Laila has to marry him if she wants to have a better life than living in a refugee camp.

Marriage has been set. Laila and Rasheed are getting married. Everything went well until Laila's first child, Aziza, was put in an orphanage because Rasheed did not have enough income to feed them daily. The limited movement of women makes them unable to

participate in society and prevents women from getting jobs and education on par with men (Lone et al., 2018). When Rasheed decides to send Aziza to an orphanage, Rasheed promises Laila that he will accompany her if she wants to meet their daughter, Aziza. However, after a few days, Rasheed started giving reasons not to go to the orphanage, even saying that he felt his lungs hurt and he had pretended that his legs hurt so that he was limping. From all that incidents, they ended up not bumping into Aziza.

Laila, angry over all of Rasheed's behavior, decided to go alone. It is not easy for a woman to travel alone in the middle of a bad city. Women are prohibited from leaving the house without a *mahram* (Bijlert, 2021), and the Taliban repeatedly abused Laila for travelling alone. The conversation above is a threat that occurred when the Taliban realized that Laila did not stop trying despite being scolded and beaten by the Taliban.

This time, Laila shielded herself with a forearm and made a grab at the belt. She missed, and Rasheed brought the belt down again. Laila caught it briefly before Rasheed yanked it free and lashed at her again. (Hosseini, 2018, p. 337)

The meeting between Laila and Tariq creates a big fight between Laila, Mariam, and Rasheed. Rasheed descended the stairs while his hands were busy unbuckling his belt. The narration above occurs when Rasheed loses focus, and Laila uses it for cover and grabs the belt that Rasheed used to beat her. Rasheed beat her again and again. When Laila managed to withstand the blow, she ran away from Rasheed. After a while, Laila managed to escape and punched Rasheed in the head. Laila's actions made Rasheed very angry, and they immediately chased Laila until blood came out of every side of Laila's body. On the other hand, there was Mariam, whose pleas were ignored by Rasheed and her attempts to calm Rasheed in the situation.

Mariam saw Laila behind him pick something up from the ground. She watched Laila hand rise overhead, hold, then come swooping down against the side of his face. Glass shattered. The jagged remains of the drinking glass rained down to the ground. (Hosseini, 2018, p. 339)

During the intense fight between Rasheed and Laila, Mariam tried to separate and help Laila. Now Rasheed was staring at her intently and looking at Mariam with renewed interest. The narration above occurs when Rasheed is no longer after her, so Laila uses it to provide resistance and revenge for what Rasheed has done to her earlier. Laila's action is also a form of her help to Mariam.

It was the last day they fought, the last day for Mariam and Laila to feel the harsh treatment of their husbands. Mariam and Laila's relationship became good. Those who initially hated each other now felt that they needed each other. Mariam's presence in Laila's life helped her so much. Mariam became a mother figure for Laila. Meanwhile, the presence of Laila and her children became an encouragement and energy for Mariam's life, which was previously very lonely. It can be seen when they work together against Rasheed, helping each other and providing assistance when one of them is in danger. Mariam would not be this brave if Laila had not come into her life and Laila would not have survived without Mariam. An act of courage and strength will emerge when everyone supports each other

Laila is finally free from Rasheed. She lives a better life. Laila finds freedom emotionally and physically. However, the past, the violence, and bad memories that Laila and Aziza have experienced make them often have nightmares. It was suffocating when Laila dreamed of returning to her house in Kabul, alone, the house was empty. Her nightmares did

not happen every day, only a few times and every time they did Laila would wake up with wet cheeks and a feeling of tightness. Laila's psychology is not completely free from her past life.

Laila and Mariam, who underwent a polygamous marriage, received a series of violence perpetrated by their own husbands. They experienced physical violence such as kicking, pushing, and hitting. They get psychological violence in the form of insulting, comparing, etc. Mariam and Laila also get sexual violence in the form of coercion of sex. The violence they receive is closely related to the patriarchal culture in their country, where women are placed as inferior and men as powerful. In addition, this study also found that women victims of domestic violence were also able to fight and recover from these conditions; even though the results were not fully significant, at least they did not surrender to the conditions that befell them.

Conclusion

The study found that Mariam and Laila experienced various acts of violence. Mariam experienced physical, psychological, and sexual forms of violence. Physical violence that Mariam experienced are kicking, pushing, and hitting. Meanwhile, the psychological violence she has experienced are insulting, discussing the past, and comparing her with Laila. Sexual violence is when Rasheed uses coercion when he wants to have sex. Moreover, Laila also received a lot of physical violence, like Mariam, in the form of kicks, punches, and dragging. Laila also experienced psychological violence in the form of death threats and physical insults. Furthermore, the domestic violence experienced by the two main female characters occurs because the male character thinks that he has more power and full authority over his wives to the point doing violence over his wives is justified. The form of resistance that Mariam has a significant effect on their lives is deciding to kill Rasheed. Mariam has gained psychological freedom because she still has to be held accountable for her actions in prison. Psychological freedom is also the most important thing in her life. Meanwhile, Laila has never obeyed Rasheed's words since the beginning. Mariam and Laila also beat, shoved, and scratched when they were in a threatened state when Rasheed was angry. The freedom that Laila gets is freedom physically and psychologically.

It can be concluded that domestic violence is common among those who hold the custom that men have a higher position than women, as exemplified by Mariam and Laila in this case. Domestic violence cannot be prevented or avoided; this act often occurs and does not look at the place and to whom. Because many people still think that only men have full power when making decisions or fighting for a political position. The fights that Mariam and Laila put into defending her were no longer in vain. Mariam and Laila have the freedom they envisioned and wanted, even though they can no longer be together in one place. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a novel that offers many complex issues to discuss. The researchers believe domestic violence can be viewed and investigated from another perspective. The researcher would like to give suggestions for researchers who may be interested in analyzing this problem in the future by using the theory of gender inequality and looking at the problem from the perspective of Aziza and Zalmai, both of whom are children of Laila.

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