



The Other Woman to Ally: Examining Trauma, Solidarity and Strength through Shug Avery and Laila

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Abstract: *The present research juxtaposes two catalytic women characters, Shug Avery from Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982); and Laila from Khaled Hoessini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007); to examine their contributions in empowering Celie and Mariam respectively. The two women, initially, embody the "other woman" trope, where Shug Avery is Albert's mistress; and Laila is Rasheed's young second wife. Both have their own narrative agencies, and it is through their vulnerable circumstances that they break the imposed label of the 'other woman'. Shug Avery and Laila are analysed through the theoretical lens of Freudian psychoanalysis which aids in exploring the childhood experiences, trauma, and deep-seated fears in the two characters. The research aims to study the two women as representative of 'mirror-stage recognition', from Lacan's perspective, where the repression eventually changes to resilience. Shug Avery reflects on her own trauma and sees herself in Celie, while Laila fathoms Mariam's helplessness and comprehends her own feebleness. The concept of 'otherness' is observed as the genesis of women solidarity, and this space of integration offers a deeper insight into feminist resistance within the ambit of psychoanalysis. Deployment of psychoanalytical theory helps ideate the study to examine the latent rivalries between Celie and Shug Avery, and Mariam and Laila – which eventually shifts to significant alliances. This transition reflects a movement from callous emotional reactions toward conscious toughness against patriarchal conditioning. The research considers studying how Oedipal dynamics of patriarchy are subverted by the protagonists in the alliance of Shug Avery and Laila. This alliance necessitates a thorough comprehension of how collective trauma is healed through relational transformations across cultural contexts. It is in this context that the research intends to centre the catalytic women characters as exemplary illustrations of allies to other women.*

Keywords: *Alliance, othering, psychoanalysis, relational transformation, trauma*

Introduction

Human psychology and society are reflected in literature. Sometimes it's the most creative and safe approach to express an unpleasant, forbidden, complicated, and yet significant situation. It frequently reflects the characters' cultures and psyches. Various literatures have subtly conveyed resistance to prejudice and injustice. These works demonstrate a readiness to address gender inequality. Breaking the silence and rediscovering the female self is the most crucial part of this struggle.

A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) by Khaled Hosseini is one of the most delicate but important books that tells the story of individuals who are the result of these two aspects, culture and human mind. In the context of Taliban control and traditional persecution of women, this novel tells the tragic narrative of two Afghani women. The next one is Alice Walker's most contentious book *The Color Purple* (1982). She used epistolary to immerse the reader in African American women's inner lives and help them comprehend the suffering they endure. The heroine of the book, Celie, writes heartfelt letters to God. This method aids Celie in self-expression, introspection, and self-reconstruction.

In literature, women are significant. Different authors depict them in different ways. Women are shown as existing just for their men's thoughts and lives, not for themselves. They were compelled to play a restricted position in women's society due to social and cultural constraints, not because they lacked self-control but rather because of the social and cultural disregard for their unity and dignity. Women have historically suffered much due to the patriarchal system, which mistreats and oppresses them.

Literature Review

The research article “*A Study of A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini: A Psychoanalytical Study” Mahi Singh Rawat, focuses on the characters' psyches. The study looks at how the novel's protagonists employed defensive mechanisms, personality traits, instincts, complexes, and other Freudian theory features to deal with their numerous internal and external issues. Additionally, it demonstrates how the characters were once immune from Freudian ideas due to cultural customs.

The intertwining oppressions of race, gender, class, and sexuality that African American women faced in the early 20th century are examined in this study's feminist and womanist analysis of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* by Ayesha Khan in her article “*From Silence To Selfhood: A Womanist Reading Of The Color Purple*”. Based on the experiences of women navigating a severely racist and patriarchal culture, the book is viewed as a potent monument to resistance, self-definition, and transformation.

Monika has explored how Celie, the main character in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, feels about the career. Two factors have been used to characterize her success: first, the female community's cohesiveness. The second is how she gets away from the agony of suffering. The first one offers her moral support and serves as an example, while the second one allows her a platform to express herself through letters to God. The researcher examined Celie's character experiences of spiritual, emotional, and bodily suffering, which enabled her to purify herself and ultimately achieve liberation. Through the application of resilient theory,

this research focused on her inward path towards liberation in the article “Oppression to Revolution: A Transformation of Celie in *The Color Purple*”.

Ruchi Nigam in her article “Surviving the Odds: Women Characters in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” states that resistance and feminism are strongly connected ideas. Further she states that one distinctive feature of female conflicts is resilience against the odds. Despite their ongoing struggles, sacrifices, and serenity, women use a variety of tactics to endure the horrible things inflicted against them.

Theoretical Framework

The present research paper argues on psychoanalytic feminism as the theoretical framework. Psychoanalytical feminism aids in analysing the selected primary text by bringing in the context of identity crisis, gender inequality, trauma and societal pressure that shape women’s experience.

The psychoanalytical condition of Celie and Mariam is analysed using Freudian theory of childhood trauma and repression. According to the concept of Freud the repressed emotions impact the life of an individual. Silence, fear and fragmented identity are the expression of repressed emotions. Women suffer internally in this patriarchal society; they are abused and are emotionally marginalised.

The protagonist’s development is examined under Jacques Lacan’s theory of mirror stage. A person’s true self is understood with the help of another person. The interaction with others aids them in forming their identity. Women living under patriarchal strings are often identified from male’s perspective. Celie in *The Colour Purple* initially feels that she is powerless and worthless about her life because of the subjugation endured. Later, with Shug’s recognition, Celie feels worthy and recreates her own self.

Similarly, Mariam also internalizes her emotions in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Rasheed’s constant abuse and humiliation make her feel useless of being alive. However, with Laila’s intervention and recognition Mariam feels motivated and emerges to question the patriarchy.

Feminist theory of otherness is also employed to bring out the representation made by Walker and Hosseini. Simon De Beauvoir suggests that society often recognises women as “other” in relation to men. Women are often depicted as rivals to each other, this notion is subverted by showing women can support each other's growth. The mutual support developed between women helps them to resist the patriarchal society and reclaim their identity.

I. Analysis of *The Colour Purple*

Celie, a humble black girl who was repeatedly raped by her own stepfather and married a widower, is the best example of a rebel against gender prejudice and social constraints. The bond between fathers was based on mental, physical, sexual, and economic oppression in a patriarchal society. Celie was silent because of the man's dominating power, which gave her inner strength and freedom. “But I don’t know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive” (Walker 26), “I do not say anything. I stay where I’m told. But I am alive” (Walker 29). She

also sought out someone to help her overcome all of her problems after becoming close to Shug, who changed her life.

Shug Avery and Celie were friends before falling in love, and Shug's presence helped Celie learn about motherly love, which makes her feel content and alive. African women are unbreakable because they develop true sisterhood. This sisterly relationship is reciprocal, meaning that both parties give and receive equally. By watching out for one another, women in this group show a great feeling of responsibility for one another and reach out to help one another. They possess a strong grasp of each other's common experiences, which unites them emotionally.

Shug is intelligent, instills a rebellious attitude in Celie, and teaches her how to live a normal life like everyone else. She goes on to discuss their obvious intimate relationship with Celie while also supporting Celie and her family. Since she is a woman, Celie has learnt to break free from the restrictive identity that has been thrust upon her. Walker goes on to discuss Celie's potential for change as well as the curative efficacy of love. She is a poor, illiterate black American girl who has the self-motivation to improve her situation. Because of her bravery, fortitude, and optimism, she is a profoundly ingrained emblem of faith in the minds of readers.

In *The Color Purple*, resistance is both collective and personal. By giving women, the social, psychological, and financial support they need to reinvent their identities, sisterhood acts as a counterforce against oppression. Shug has a more subdued but no less profound impact. Celie is motivated to question her husband's power by her artistic expression, independence, and reluctance to follow patriarchal norms. Celie's transition from silent suffering to active resistance is sparked by Shug's nurturing of her voice, self-worth, and creativity. From miscommunication and envy to unity and group empowerment, the women's relationships change. They develop resilience and support one another in seeing options outside of patriarchal domination by means of their common experiences.

The novel's reinterpretation of spirituality is among its most important kinds of resistance. The repressive structures that rule women's lives are reflected in the conventional patriarchal view of God as a distant, angry, male ruler. Shug helps Celie develop a fresh perspective of divinity that is based on inner power, inclusiveness, and the natural world.

Celie is freed from fear and subordination by her spiritual reorientation. She rejects the masculine monopoly on religion and gains the strength to face injustice by realizing the divine in both herself and the world. Her emotional and financial freedom are entwined with her spiritual enlightenment, signifying a complete liberty that includes body, mind, and soul.

Celie is a woman who got raped multiple times, banned to study, her step father sell her to a widower who brutally abuse her, he sell her children, beaten and tortured like an object, hides her only supporter sister's letters; she has under gone all the torches but she give a tough fight against patriarchy society and she turns all the barriers into a carrier by allowing herself to be taught by Shug and to stand up for herself and that kind of resilience is eventually rewarded. At end she is a businesswoman. (Monika 3521)

The story is in line with feminist and womanist beliefs that oppose patriarchal hierarchy, biological essentialism, and the marginalization of women's voices. Key feminist

themes: resistance to masculine aggression, economic independence, sexual autonomy, and identity reclamation are embodied by Walker's characters. The book depicts physical, sexual, mental, and psychological abuse in an unapologetic manner. Women are denied education, subjected to assault, and have limited mobility. Men's and women's relationships are shown as places where power is used, frequently violently.

Economic deprivation, limited access to education, and systemic violence frame the women's struggles. By situating personal narratives within this broader context, Walker highlights the social structures that perpetuate oppression. The text becomes a historical document as much as a literary one, offering insight into the lived realities of Black women during this era. (Khan h596)

However, the story combats this cruelty with development and healing. Her choice to divorce her marriage is a significant turning point in her self-assertion. By anchoring her freedom in material terms through her sewing company, economic empowerment breaks the cycle of reliance that upholds patriarchal dominance.

A collective story of survival is created by the women's shared experiences and support of one another throughout difficult times. Their release is gradual rather than abrupt, characterized by spiritual, intellectual, and emotional breakthroughs.

One of the strongest ideas in the novel is that women can overcome oppression when they support one another. Walker presents sisterhood as an alternative to patriarchy. Instead of competing with one another, women in the novel create relationships based on love, care and mutual understanding. (Geetanjali 341)

II. Analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Mariam's existence of rejection and humiliation first shapes her character. She is raised in a modest, remote home on the outside of Herat after being born illegitimately to wealthy businessman Jalil and his servant Nana. Mariam appears to accept her lot as something she cannot change; therefore, it is not immediately clear how resilient she is.

Mariam's early years are characterized by silent misery, and the time she ties the knot off to Rasheed, an older man, she is considered as an outsider and a source of shame despite her father's sporadic visits and displays of affection, and her mother's unceasing negativity adds to her poor self-esteem.

Mariam's husband and father subjected her to a great deal of oppression. Her father had emotionally wounded her, and she yearned for his approval. Even though she spent the night outside the front gate on her birthday, he did not meet her. Additionally, Mariam pleaded with Jalil to prevent her from marrying Rasheed, but he disregarded her requests. Mariam experienced both physical and emotional abuse from Rasheed in addition to emotional abuse from Jalil.

Hosseini gave a detailed account of the physical abuse Mariam endured at the hands of her husband. Mariam suffered from Rasheed on several occasions throughout the narrative, yet she did nothing to get away. "There was no cursing, no screaming, no pleading, no surprised yelps, only the systematic business of beating and being beaten, the thump, thump of something

solid repeatedly striking flesh, something, someone, hitting a wall with a thud, cloth ripping.” (Hosseini 161)

Therefore, it is claimed that how society saw women had an impact on a woman's obedience to her husband. There was no assistance outside, even if she managed to get away from the suffering in her home. “Gender role has always been a controversy associated with gender inequality, discrimination, stereotyping, and ethics of sexual difference.” (Estimada 1) Another character in the novel is Laila, who was intelligent and protective as a child, but circumstances led her to Rasheed, where she also experienced oppression.

Rasheed hated Laila's sophisticated demeanour. Hosseini also revealed Laila to be a strong mother and a decent woman. Every time Laila tried to see her daughter Aziza in the orphanage, she was repeatedly beaten by the Taliban, but this didn't deter her. Women were oppressed not just at home but also on the streets. “If she was lucky, she was given a tongue lashing or a single kick to the rear, a shove in the back. Other times, she met with assortments of wooden clubs, fresh tree branches, short whips, slaps, often fists.” (Hosseini 192)

One strategy for overcoming tyranny in a patriarchal home or community is sisterhood. Mariam and Laila's lack of affection for one another quickly gave way to a sisterhood to keep off their husband's mistreatment.

Hosseini stresses the sisterhood of two women when fate called them to. Mariam, who is a representation of a typical Afghan woman, submissive and passive, became conscious of her strength and subjugation with the influence of Laila who was smart and educated. (Estimada 6)

The novel's emotional core is Mariam and Laila's resilience in the face of overwhelming tragedy. Despite having quite diverse backgrounds and life experiences, both the women represent the idea of perseverance in the face of insurmountable obstacles. Rivalry and mistrust give way to a strong connection of sisterhood and mutual survival between Mariam and Laila. Despite being strangers at first, both women learn that their survival depends on both individual and group resilience. Hosseini examines the intricacies of female physical power, the transformational force of unconditional affection, and the various ways in which adversity can mould a person's identity through their own paths. “Hosseini handles the patriarchy mechanism in built deep into the society and raises his voice on the side of women who reject the mentality that accepts women as possessions. Through the women characters his mission is to highlight the female voice not to be heard as the inferior sex.” (Cevik 58)

Comparative analysis and Conclusion

The Freudian concept of repressed emotion resulting in silence, fear and anxiety can be observed through the characters Celie from *The Colour Purple* and Mariam from *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Both the characters endure difficult childhood days that make them silently endure the sufferings inflicted upon them by the society. Celie's father sexually abuses her when she was a child, this Oedipal complex makes her feel worn out and silently seek for support. Similarly, the character Mariam from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* also experiences a difficult and abusive childhood because of her illegitimate status. In both cases, it is the father

who mistreats their daughters, which marks the supremacy held by a male in this society. They expressed their emotions through silence and remained resilient.

What is repressed cannot, it is true, as a rule make its way into memory without more ado; but it retains a capacity for effective action, and, under the influence of some external event, it may one day bring about psychical consequences which can be regarded as products of a modification of the forgotten memory and as derivatives of it and which remain unintelligible unless we take this view of them. (*Delusions and Dreams In Jensen's Gradiva* 35)

The characters Celie and Mariam recreate themselves when Shug Avery and Laila enter their life respectively. Lacan's mirror stage reflection theory can be observed in both Walker and Hosseini's narrative.

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. Thus, to break out of the circle of the Innenwelt into the Umwelt generates the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verifications. (Ecrits 3)

Celia and Mariam reshape their Identity after their interaction with Shug and Laila respectively. The relationship thus formed helped the characters to emerge from the patriarchal knot. Both the characters become empowered and erased the feeling of otherness which they were carrying. The characters were initially depicted as “other” when viewing from a male perspective, it is with the help of other women they were able to emerge from that imposed state.

Feminist frameworks help to illuminate how patriarchal structures define women's roles, suppress creativity, and devalue their intellectual contributions. Womanist perspectives further emphasise the racialised dimensions of this oppression, recognising that mainstream feminism has historically overlooked or marginalised Black women's experiences. (Khan h595)

Thus, *The Colour Purple* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are the two novels that are well knitted around women characters portraying the expression of repressed emotions through silence, fear and ambiguous thoughts about their own life. Male domination is obvious through the characters. It is because of the father, and husband figures a woman suffers in their life. Women seek help from other women and get empowered with their mutual support, which is evident in case of Celie and Mariam, with Shug and Laila they come out of the domination and light up their life. The bright childhood and bravery of a woman help to reshape another woman's life.

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