

# Individual Trauma and Inter-generational Trauma in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper presentation is to shed light on the trauma experienced by an individual and intergenerational trauma through Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Critically analyzing the characters in the novel, this research paper unravels the intricate layers of personal suffering and transmission of trauma across generations. Intergenerational trauma can happen when a parent experiences the trauma as a child and the cycle of trauma impacts their parenting. In the novel, both the heroines undergo very distressing or oppressive events and their emotional and behavioral reactions ripple through the generations of the family. Many characters in the novel feel traumatized individually. Especially, the female characters in the novel have become the victims of the violent society. This research paper also highlights how an individual suffers through Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This traumatic disorder affects the people who have survived through a dangerous event in their life and the recurrence of the event going in their mind makes them feel traumatized. The research concludes by summing up the traumatic events in the novel, which may lead to psychopathological disturbances by affecting the personal and social lives of individuals.

## Keywords

Traumatization, Personal suffering, Intergenerational trauma and Oppression.

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This paper magnifies the impacts of cyclical nature of suffering and trauma within families, providing a poignant exploration of the lasting impact across generations through the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist and former physician, who enlightened the global audience about Afghanistan's people and culture. Hosseini, who was born in Kabul, Afghanistan provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

He published his first novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003), which became a bestseller. The 2007 masterwork, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini explores how dramatically life changed during the Taliban Regime. His other works include "And the Mountains Echoed" (2013) and "Sea Prayer" (2018). He was honored with multiple awards, including Book Sense Book of the Year Award for Adult Fiction for *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in 2008.

This presentation underscores how an individual is profoundly affected by the trauma they experienced and how it has far-reaching impacts on subsequent generations. Most of the characters in this novel endure various traumatic experiences which include forced marriages, domestic violence, loss of loved ones, war-related hardships and societal oppression.

Rasheed's trauma stems from the loss of his first family, which profoundly affects his emotional wellbeing. Rasheed's harsh upbringing and the violent backdrop of war contribute to the complex layers of his individual trauma, which manifest as abusive behavior.

Witnessing the deaths of his wife and son during the war leaves him emotionally scarred. This research paper also

brings out the harsh reality that Rasheed suffered through Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder. His mental health after the traumatic events shapes his abusive tendencies towards Mariam and Laila. The pain of his traumatic past leads him to become emotionally detached. This kind of psychological state prompts him to control and dominate those around him. His inability to cope with past losses manifests his fear of vulnerability and abandonment. Rasheed's individual trauma also contributes to a cycle of pain that affects the next generation. Zalmai, Rasheed's son, becomes a vessel for this inter-generational trauma as he observes and internalizes his father's aggressive demeanor. Rasheed's inter-generational trauma not only affects his relationship with Zalmai but also shapes the way Zalmai perceives and interacts with the world. Witnessing his father's abusive tendencies becomes a formative experience for Zalmai, influencing his understanding of relationships. Zalmai may carry forward these learned behaviors of exposure to violence and control. This research paper portrays how the consequences of one generation's trauma can reverberate, affecting the emotional well-being and behaviors of the next. The cycle perpetuates itself, highlighting the profound impact of unresolved trauma on subsequent generations.

Mariam, one of the two main protagonists undergoes both individual trauma and intergenerational trauma passed on from her mother, Nana. Delving into the trauma experienced by Mariam, she was restricted to have connection with the outside world and this isolated existence exacerbates her sense of abandonment. The desolate setting of her home, the kolba,

reflects a sense of confinement, intensifying the oppressive nature of her surroundings. The absence of support and understanding intensifies her emotional struggle, leaving Mariam to confront her pain in the stark silence of the kolba's confines. Her life was shaped by the constraints of societal expectations and the harsh realities of her circumstances.

weight of cultural norms and gender roles presses down on her, limiting her choices and autonomy. "Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always" (Nana,3)

Mariam's feelings of powerlessness was amplified through her cold, dimly lit surroundings and the solitude she experiences are mirrored through the echoes of her footsteps. The kolba, which was once a place of refuge, transforms into a place of suffering, shaping Mariam's emotional landscape with the indelible scars of individual trauma. The loss, abuse, and hardships she endures leave a lasting impact on her mental well-being. The novel portrays Mariam's struggles against the trauma through vivid descriptions of her haunted memories, anxiety, and the emotional aftermath of her traumatic experiences. Her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is evident in moments of distress, nightmares, and a pervasive sense of fear that lingers, influencing her thoughts and actions throughout the narrative. Mariam's journey illustrates the profound effects of trauma on one's mental health and the enduring nature of its impact. She felt overwhelmingly restrictive and hostile when she was married to Rasheed, which adds another layer of oppression. His domineering presence and abusive behavior create an atmosphere of fear and submission. The constant threat of violence, making every moment tense and unpredictable for Mariam. The marriage, initially a source of hope, transforms into a suffocating bond that contributes to the overall oppressive environment she endures. The nuanced portrayal of traumatized characters in the novel adds depth to the narrative, highlighting the personal suffering and harsh realities faced by individuals in war-torn Afghanistan.

The impacts of intergenerational trauma is explored through the relationship between Nana and Mariam, in which Nana's own traumatic experiences, including abandonment and societal stigma, deeply affect Mariam. Nana's bitterness and resentment become ingrained in Mariam's psyche, influencing her self-perception and relationships. "You are a clumsy little harami. This is my reward for everything I've endured. An heirloom-breaking, clumsy little harami". (Nana,7)

Nana transfers her emotional scars to Mariam, shaping her worldview and contributing to a sense of unworthiness. Mariam's struggles are not only a result of her own experiences but are profoundly linked to the intergenerational trauma passed down by her mother. This paper poignantly depicts how the burdens of past trauma can cast a long shadow, affecting not only the individuals who directly experience it but also permeating through generations. Mariam's narrative highlights the complex interplay between personal suffering and the enduring legacy of trauma within families.

Laila, another important character in the novel who feels

traumatized both individually and intergenerationally was left with both physical and emotional scars due to the loss of her loved ones. She even felt the survivor's guilt which pressed on her shoulders as everyone around her was dead. Fear and anxiety always lurked in the corners of her mind. Laila was trapped between reality and haunting dreams or nightmares because of the post traumatic stress she experienced. The individual trauma shapes Laila's perspective, causing emotional struggles, nightmares, and a sense of vulnerability. The personal nature of these challenges makes her journey through trauma a deeply internal and solitary battle, influencing how she copes with and navigates the difficulties she faces. Laila's post-traumatic stress disorder manifests as haunting memories and persistent anxiety stemming from the traumatic events she endured. The echoes of violence and loss linger in her thoughts, causing intrusive flashbacks that disrupt her daily life. Sleep disturbances become a constant companion as she battles nightmares that vividly replay the harrowing moments she experienced. Bad dreams make it hard for her to sleep well. The fear of reliving past horrors can trigger intense emotional reactions, leading to a heightened state of alertness. Laila's struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder permeates her daily existence, leaving her emotionally scarred and grappling with the lasting impact of the traumas she endured. She finds it challenging to trust others because of what she went through. Overall, the tough experiences affects how she feels and behaves every day.

As we navigate the difficult circumstances of early life, the trauma experienced by Aziza is quite mentionable. Aziza, daughter of Laila and Tariq, was born out of wedlock faces societal stigma and rejection, which shapes her sense of identity. Aziza undergoes separation from her mother and endures harsh conditions of an orphanage, facing neglect and absence of maternal care. She faces emotional distress and mistreatment from caregivers. The orphanage itself is portrayed as a grim place with insufficient resources, where children lack proper attention and nurturing. These experiences collectively contribute to Aziza's complex emotional journey, which reflects her hardship and resilience.

As a concluding note, this research paper magnifies the impact of traumatization experienced by individuals in the war torn Afghanistan and the cycle of trauma passed on to generations. Khaled Hosseini has critically dealt with highlighting the traumatic events in the novel. The traumatic experiences should be given serious attention in the world of neglecting our inner selves and adaptability to the external atmosphere. This research henceforth brings out the experience of individuals experience trauma without raising voice against the issues.

## References

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