

Analysis on the Traumas of the Female Characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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A Thousand Splendid Suns is a classic work of Afghan American writer Khaled Hosseini after his first novel *The Kite Runner*, which tells the tragic lives of two Afghan women—Mariam and Laila. And it's an incredible story about family, friendship, faith and salvation through love. At the same time, this essay based on the theory of trauma interprets the lives of Mariam and Laila, and thus explains their external manifestations of trauma and trauma recovery.

Keywords: trauma theory, recovery, external manifestations

Freud defined trauma as a kind of experience. If in a very short period of time, the mind is subjected to the highest level of stimulation which would cause the mind lack of normal way to seek adaption, the allocation of the effective ability of the mind is permanently disturbed. This kind of experience can be called trauma. Life will not be smooth all the way through. It is inevitable to encounter all kinds of setbacks and frustrations. The most consequence is that some people will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). To achieve the trauma recovery, it is important to restore the sense of security, rebuild the sense of confidence in the outside world, open your heart to the outside world and express to the outside world your traumatic experience, so as to relieve psychological pressure and then build a new interpersonal relationship.

The Trauma Manifestations of Mariam and Laila

The fates of Mariam and Laila bear different traumatic experience, experiencing the psychological changes from fear to loss, and finally to indifference. Mariam and her mother Nana lived under other people's disdains and cold eyes. Her mother cursed the fate and complained the life, while her father rejected her as if she was a burden. After being married to Rasheed, she was subjected to domestic violence with constant bad luck, which left her in shocking plight for a long time, leading a humble life and losing her basic human dignity. According to the trauma theory, after a traumatic experience, people often suffer from anxiety and panic, feeling isolated and helpless. Mariam was originally full of infinite hope for the future, eager to live a happy life. After four years of marriage with Rasheed, she experienced several abortions, gradually lost the faith, courage and passion for the future life. Her mind was filled with the deepest fears. Unlike Mariam, Laila had a happy childhood with a doting father, Tariq who grew up with her, and a close friend. However, the war changed everything. Laila lost her

family, the great changes made her often in a trance, mumbling or keeping silent all the time, which is an obvious manifestation of severe mental trauma.

For the external manifestations of PTSD, Mariam changed from evading to depression and to indifference; After Laila experienced all the disasters happened to her friend and family, she experienced anorexia, anxiety, depression and severe pain both mentally and psychologically. All these reactions they had after traumas are the external manifestation of PTSD.

The Root of Mariam's Trauma

Oppression by Patriarchy

In a typically patriarchal country, Afghan women do not have access to any rights, including education, health care and work. Paternity is like a ghost hunting all the time, and women are under its shackles. Mariam gradually lost her subjective consciousness. Mariam was the illegitimate daughter of the maid and the master, which was not recognized in Afghanistan, and that means that Mariam was born a tragedy. 15-year-old Mariam missed her father so much that she resolutely left Nana, which led to Nana's death. With no place to go, Mariam was forced to marry the shoemaker Rasheed. Rasheed is an epitome of male supremacy. As the bread winner for the family, he is like a master, a king, whose authority is beyond doubt. For Rasheed, Mariam is just a tool to give birth to babies and to satisfy his sexual desires. As feminist scholar Beauvoir pointed out, marriage is the fate assigned to women by traditional society. Later, Mariam began soul-searching and awakening in desperation. She knew that cowardice and patience couldn't change the status and win human dignity, which were held in her hands instead. Finally, she threw the shovel to Rasheed, and this was the first time for her to decide the course of her life.

The Burqa That Binds the Soul

Islam has required women in public to wear the burqa since puberty, which is a smock consisting of a long robe, a cloth scarf and a veil that covers only except the eyes. Comparatively speaking, war brings people a kind of explicit mental trauma, while burqa is invisible as shackles, causing implicit psychological trauma. At Rasheed's insistence, Mariam, who was quite emotional about wearing the burqa, gradually adapted to it and even had a strange sense of transcendence to see the world through the veil. And then, Mariam gradually lost her sense of self-consciousness and became numb and resigned to the value standards of men. As well, burqa became the best tool for her to be self-comforting and self-protecting.

As a representative of the Afghan women who are victims of all these, Mariam is a window to reflect the ideology of Afghan society.

The Trauma Recoveries of Mariam and Laila

According to the trauma theory, harmony of interpersonal relationship, mutual talk and even religious indoctrination can play certain roles in the recovery of trauma. It is particularly valuable that Mariam and Laila were redeemed from the tragic life, able to reshape themselves and gain a new life. The process of their recovery is:

To Establish a Deep Sisterhood

They both lost relatives, had fallen into the hands of Rasheed and were abused by Rasheed both mentally and psychologically. At the beginning they were against each other, and then made it even. Finally they cultivated a deep sisterhood. The process was from confusion, numbness, and even despair to wake up. They were together against the injustice of fate, and finally changed the trajectory of life. This shows that, as a vulnerable group of women, it is difficult to change their own fate and social reality alone, only uniting against the cruel reality hand in hand, can they enjoy the bright sunshine of a thousand splendid suns.

According to trauma theory, a healthy, safe, harmonious and stable interpersonal relationship is conducive to enhancing trust between people, so that the person can rebuild confidence in society and establish new interpersonal relationship. Originally, Mariam lost confidence in society and life, with no sense of security, but in the interaction with Laila and Aziza, she regained confidence, rebuilt self-consciousness, awakened the inner sense of true self, re-integrated into the society, and gained endless happiness and power. Sisterhood love healed the psychological trauma of Mariam. She was able to return to society, find the lost self. For the happiness of Laila, Mariam was willing to sacrifice herself. She died quietly and gratefully, filled with love and warmth, and when she died, she felt that she had realized the meaning of her life and that she had been redeemed.

To Express the Traumatic Experience

According to the trauma theory, trauma victims need to be willing to open their hearts to others, reveal their traumatic experience, and re-understand their traumatic experience. Trauma victims need to tell objectively and truthfully, and the other party need to be good at listening to create a good atmosphere. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Laila played the role of a loyal listener, and Mariam was willing to open up to vent her emotions, release her negative energy, and heal her psychological wounds. Unhappy marriage, terrible domestic violence, endless humiliation, it is the reappearance of memories, talk and vent that help Mariam began self-reflection and recognition. Laila's story with Tariq is a reenactment of the trauma. It is the trust, support and encouragement of her listener, Tariq that enable Laila to face them squarely.

Mariam and Laila have different traumatic experiences. The ways and means to solve trauma of them are not the same, but they are both through the reconstruction of new interpersonal relationship, establish a safe and harmonious environment, treat each other frankly, talk to each other and relieve psychological pressure. At the same time, there is also the silent enlightenment and influence of religion. Mariam left, but eventually found herself again; Laila shook off Rasheed's bullying and rediscovered her peace of mind with Tariq. At the end of the novel, Laila returned to the orphanage, which was filled with the innocent laughter of children, heralding all that is good in the world. She fulfilled her father's will and decided to forget the past hatred and start a new journey of life.

Hosseini's delicate and heartfelt prose reproduces a moving, tear-jerking story. The heroines go through many hardships. "People can't count how many bright moons are there on her roof, nor can they count the thousand bright suns behind her walls." A thousand splendid suns finally broke through the veil of haze and healed the wounds in the heart.

Conclusion

This essay mainly focuses on three perspectives to interpret the novel: the trauma manifestations of Mariam and Laila; the root of Mariam's trauma and the trauma recoveries of Mariam and Laila. This can not only make it easier for the readers to acknowledge the trauma experience of the female characters, but have even more realistic significance even in today's world. The world has been improving and becomes more and more advanced, but we still have to admit that women are still in an inferior social position and need more attention and efforts to achieve real equality. It's not an obstacle for just Mariam and Laila, but for us all women now.

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