

Oppression of
women: a
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Andrea Dworkin, claimed that, ' Women have been taught that, for us, the earth is flat, and that if we venture out, we will fall off the edge', this is shown within both novels as the female characters are presented as being controlled within society. Hosseini presents the female characters Laila and Mariam as oppressed within society in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, this is shown through a dual narration of Mariam and Laila to show a difference in characterization. Hosseini does this to demonstrate the juxtaposition between both characters, as Mariam is referred to a ' harami' within the novel which is the Farsi word for ' bastard', whereas Laila comes from a well-respected, educated family and is characterized by her beauty as " she was a pari, a stunner". Hosseini illustrates the contrast between both women to show that any women will become a victim towards their husband and oppressed in Afghan society. Similarly, within *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy also illustrates Tess as a victim but within Victorian society, as both Alec and Angel take advantage of her due to gender bias, in which Tess is considered to be a " fallen women". Both novels show a male dominated society where women were oppressed.

Hosseini demonstrates the harsh living situations in Afghanistan where status and wealth was very important within society. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the time setting took place from the early 1960s to the early 2000s which illustrates the journey of the way women were treated, as throughout the years the treatment of women has become harsher due to the takeover of the Taliban. In England the feminist movement took place which led to change of how women were portrayed and treated within society, in which modern readers would be shocked about the way the characters Mariam and

Laila were treated. Hosseini presents the Afghanistan culture within the first chapter as Mariam respects her father more than her mother and speaks highly of him as “ she never felt like a harami around him”, this could suggest that her father makes her feel normal, rather than an outcast of society, however it could be argued that Mariam respected her father as it was part of the cultural to norm to respect male figures as they were considered to be dominant. Hosseini reflects the power of male dominance in the first chapter as this is the main theme within the novel, which is shown as a simile “ Like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman”, this demonstrates the superiority of men within the Afghanistan culture, as women would always be at fault in situations even if they were victims of abuse. Afghanistan readers would be able to comprehend Mariam and Laila as victims of society as there are still some cases where women are still being oppressed by their husbands within the Afghanistan culture as it is considered to be a social norm.

Whereas, Hardy presents Tess of the d’Urberville in a Victorian society during the 1800s which was before the feminist movement began, in which women were not treated equally to men. In Tess of the d’Urbervilles, Tess falls victim to Alec as he took her away her virginity. But becomes a victim of love as Angel refuses her love as she is no longer considered to be pure. Tess goes against everything she believes in as she accepts her position in society and mentions to Angel that, “ you know best what my punishment should be”, this shows that Tess has now become inferior and acknowledges that she will never be an equal. It could be argued that Tess is a representation of women within Victorian society, as men would base

judgement on women on the basis of their appearance. This is shown within the second chapter as Tess is illustrated to be a “ handsome girl” whom has “ a mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes” the description of Tess could represent how a Victorian woman should be as the word “ peony” is a flower which symbolizes purity thus could imply that women should be pure; and is also used to foreshadow the loss of Tess’s virginity. Hardy uses a third person limited narrator in order for the readers to understand the difficulties that Tess endures. Although, it could be suggested that Hardy gives a biased approach within the narration, but he does illustrate Angel’s views and feelings to demonstrate the double standards within society. Chez Zen claims that Tess of the d’Urbervilles is , “ one of the most influential and well-revived books in world literature, Tess brought Hardy great fame and honor as well as incurring harsh rebukes from conventional society”, this demonstrates the importance that society has on the oppression of women.

Both Hardy and Hosseini show their female characters to be oppressed within marriage, as marriage was expected within both societies. This is shown in A Thousand Splendid Suns as Hosseini marries off Mariam and Laila at a young age to portray that young girls would be married off to older men as their purpose was to provide men with children. In Afghanistan multi marriages were common, however only men would be able to have multi marriages, as Mariam’s father had “ three wives and nine children”, suggesting that women were treated unequally within society and illustrates discrimination towards women as they were unable to have multi marriages. However, it could be argued that Mariam is presented as undesirable in society, as she is constantly referred to a “ harami”, but Hosseini also

presents Mariam to be infertile, in which she becomes unworthy within the marriage. Therefore, Rasheed decides to marry Laila without considering Mariam's feelings as she says, " I...I don't want this", this conveys that women were not considered equals within society. It could be interpreted that the repetition of " I" suggests hesitation which could imply that Mariam is scared, which is a common emotion that women felt towards their husbands. Laila at the age of fifteen marries Rasheed, which suggests that Rasheed whom is around " sixty or more now", takes advantage of the situation as Laila has no family to protect her in which she has no choice but to accept the cultural norms in Afghanistan. Hosseini demonstrates the harshness in Afghanistan marriage as Mariam and Laila are physically abused by Rasheed as he, " raised the belt again and this time came at Mariam", this suggests that the abuse was constant to both women and implies that violence towards women were common within Afghanistan marriage, in which they were unable to avoid, showing their lack of control. Hosseini shows the treatment of women to be oppressed within society especially when the Taliban took over as women were restricted with little control.

Similarly, Hardy illustrates Tess as a victim within her marriage due to a complicated relationship with Alec and Angel. It could be suggested that Hardy demonstrates Tess's relationship, by the use of journey within the novel, this is because Tess is constantly travelling which symbolizes her journey between both Alec and Angel, both whom takes advantage of Tess due to her sexuality. Alec hurts Tess physically by taking away her virginity this is implied by the description of " practically blank as snow", the word "

practically” suggests that Tess is no longer pure. Hardy makes references of birds, which is a motif within the novel, this is because the bird could be symbolic of Tess as, “ hopping of a bird finally died away”, and this reiterates that Tess is no longer innocent and pure, due to the loss of her virginity. It could be interpreted that the bird symbolizes Tess, as the bird is illustrated as no longer free, suggesting it is oppressed. Angel causes Tess psychological pain as their relationship is based on passion in which he refuses her within the marriage. Angel and Tess’s marriage represents double standards within Victorian society, as both Tess and Angel were not pure when they married each other. This is shown when both characters confessed about their past, in which Angel refused to forgive Tess as, “ forgiveness does not apply in this case”, this shows the implications that gender has within Victorian society as consequences is only applied to women. This is because, Tess is portrayed as a villain as she is no longer the pure women in which society expects her to be. It could be suggested that Tess is a representation of Victorian women whom becomes victim to the male dominated world. Hardy gives another example of women suffering the consequences of men, this is shown when Tess is blamed for Alec’s actions, “ See how you’ve mastered me!”, implying that women were at fault if men would take advantage of them, as the word “ mastered”, illustrates an element of power that women have, which is their physical appearance. However, it could be argued that Hosseini no longer presents Mariam and Laila as a victim within Afghanistan society. This is shown when Mariam, “ was deciding the course of her own life”, this shows the empowerment that Mariam as she refuses to be controlled and abused by Rasheed. Hosseini illustrates Mariam taking control when she took the “ shovel” and, “ gave it <https://assignbuster.com/oppression-of-women-a-comparison-of-a-thousand-splendid-suns-and-tess-of-the-dubervilles/>

everything she had”, this demonstrates juxtaposition of power, as Mariam now has the upper hand, in order to prevent Rasheed from having control. Although it could be suggested that the use of pathetic fallacy of “ the darkness began to lift”, is used to present the death of Rasheed who represents the “ darkness”, this could illustrate that Mariam and Laila will no longer be victims, however it could also foreshadow the punishment that Mariam shall receive. Even though, Hosseini presents Mariam as a strong, powerful woman in Afghan society based on her actions towards Rasheed, this empowerment does not last long as she is punished for her actions. This is because within the Afghanistan society if a woman kills a man then she would receive a public death sentence regardless of the situation. Although, if a man injured or killed his wife then it would be acceptable as women were considered as inferior, this is suggested as the law requires “ one male witness but two female ones”, implying that a man’s word is trusted over a woman. Mariam accepts her position within society and accepts the death sentence as she “ thought, she should die this way”, it could be interpreted that the death of Mariam is the only way out of a controlled society.

Likewise, Hardy presents his character Tess, to take control of the situation and no longer be oppressed within Victorian society. This is shown when Tess decides to no longer be taken advantage by Alec. This is illustrated when Tess murders Alec as, “ The dead silence within was broken only by a regular beat”, this metaphor could illustrate the guilt of Tess which is suggested by “ regular beat”, although it could also suggest that Tess is afraid of the punishment she would receive. The death of Alec could suggest that the only way that women were able to be empowered within Victorian society by removing the male figure from their life. However, similar to A Thousand
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Splendid Suns Tess is punished for her actions which was a public death sentence, this could suggest that women were dehumanized as the death of Tess was shown as a form of public entertainment.

In conclusion, both Hardy and Hosseini demonstrate women being oppressed in society despite there being around a 100 years between the publications. Both novels explore similar cultural aspects where a woman should be married and pure before the marriage, as both Laila and Tess were not pure before marriage. It could be interpreted that Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a Victorian tragedy due to the treatment of woman and the way they were oppressed within society. The only way out for Tess being hurt by both Alec and Angel is death, in which Tess has accepted her fate within society. It could be argued that the Afghanistan culture subjugates women more due to the extreme laws that took place during the 20th century in comparison to the way were treated during the 19th century within Victorian society. However, both novels illustrate gender bias, as women were oppressed within society and were discriminated due to their gender.

Word count: 2046

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