



ABSCISSION OF FAMILIAL BONDING: A MARXIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

Muhammad Umair

Mu79274@gmail.com

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, Muslim Youth
University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Prof. Dr. Iesar Ahmad

iesar.ahmad@myu.edu.pk

Prof. Department of English, Muslim Youth University,
Islamabad, Pakistan

Abstract

This study examined the phenomenon of familial disintegration in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) through the theoretical lens of familial *abscission* within a Marxist feminist framework. The conceptualization of the research viewed *abscission* as a gradual and structured separation of emotion and relationship that was regulated and conditioned by status rather than an abrupt discontinuity. Through qualitative literary analysis and close reading, the paper examined the role of patriarchal subjugation, financial dependence, ideological domination, war, and unpaid housework as the combined effect of these factors led to gradual destruction of family ties. The results indicated that relationships in the family in the novel were systematically undermined by conflicting regimes of oppression that defined the domestic space as a place of power over intimacy. Emotional and physical work done by women was not acknowledged and it brought about psychological fatigue, alienation and emotional detachment. The domestic realm specifically in the home of Rasheed was a microstructure of patriarchal rule of emotional expression where emotion was schooled and related ties were disorganized in an orderly manner. This process was further enhanced by war and socio-political turbulence, which accessed the personal sphere and turned the family space into a space of internal insecurity and fear. Despite these conditions, the study also found that moments of female solidarity and resistance occurred, particularly in the relationship between Mariam and Laila, which reconfigured emotional bonds within oppressive structures. The study concluded that familial *abscission* operated as both a process of disintegration and transformation, revealing how family systems are gradually reshaped under sustained structural pressures.

Keywords: *Familial Abscission, Marxist Feminism, Khaled Hosseini, A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007), Domestic Space, Patriarchy, Emotional Labor, War and Violence, Ideological Control, Female Agency*

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Umair (Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan.)

Email: Mu79274@gmail.com

1. Introduction & Background

This paper examines the issue of familial disintegration with the theoretical lens of *abscission* by applying a Marxist feminist perspective to the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khaled Hosseini. *Abscission*, initially a plant-physiological term, is the systematic and controlled process of losing plant organs like leaves, flowers, or fruits. According to Osborne (1989) *abscission* can be defined as the planned loss of parts and Taylor (2001) further elaborates on the concept by defining *abscission* as a developmentally regulated and normal process that takes place with or without a special separation zone. Significantly, *abscission* is non-random, non-pathological but an organized, conditional, and adaptive process that facilitates survival, regeneration, and structural economies in biological systems.

In scientific research (Addicott, 1982), *abscission* is a gradual, internally controlled process by hormones and externally affected by the environment. It takes place on certain areas of the cells that have structural weakening to enable detachment. *Abscission*, therefore, does not imply decomposition but a calculated and planned act of division. This concept, when applied metaphorically beyond the field of biology, offers a strong analysis tool in focusing on disintegration forms, not immediate, but gradual, normalized, and structurally made.

Abscission in philosophical and socio-cultural contexts has been employed to explain the fragmentation in human relationships and human subjectivities. An example is Meyers (2001) who uses the concept to elaborate on types of internal and external rupture that take place within social systems of today. Applied to familial structures, *abscission* helps to acquire the subtle sense that relationships are destroyed not at the very moment of breakdown but are created as the result of the long-lasting exposure to systemic pressures. It is possible to regard familial bonds, then, as being shed out due to the effects of ideological, economic and institutional influence towards them.

The present study builds upon the concept of familial *abscission* introduced by Umair and Ahmad (2026), which conceptualizes family disintegration as a gradual, regulated process influenced by patriarchy, capitalism, and ideological control.

In the patriarchal and stratified societies, family units are deeply rooted in the larger power structures. Family relationships are neither emotional nor personal ones; they are defined by socio-economic hierarchies, cultural standards, institutional restrictions. Women especially tend to be relationally detached using economic dependence mechanisms, limited agency, and social coercion. The effects of emotional alienation, lack of autonomy and structural inequality are all contributing factors towards the progressive rupture of familial bonds. *Abscission* in this regard is a useful metaphor to explain the fragmentation of families as a regulated, global system and not an accident or a phenomenon.

This paper contextualizes the term *abscission* in the context of Marxist feminism in theory. Marxist theory is based on the contributions of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and focuses on influence of material circumstances and economic organizations on development of social relationships. According to Marx and Engels (1848), the design of society is basically defined by the control and ownership of the means of production, which contributes to the arrangement of the class relations, cultural norms, and institutional practices. According to this approach, society is subdivided into hostile categories, where exploitation and inequalities are natural characteristics of the capitalist system.

Engels carries this interpretation into the sphere of gender in his masterpiece *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) as he argues that the historical subordination of women was associated with the development of personal property. As patriarchal families emerged, they became dependent economically on their male counterparts, and they were marginalized both at home and outside. This transformation contextualized gender inequality as well as reconstructed the family as a place of control, reproduction and economic dependence.

Marxist feminism develops on these observations by looking at the ways in which capitalism and patriarchy are interrelated systems of domination. According to scholars like Barrett (1980), oppression of women is facilitated by economic exploitation and ideology. Women in the family are also restricted to unpaid domesticity and reproduction, with reduced access to financial resources and opportunities at the same time. This duality creates what is widely referred to as a state of dual marginalization where women are marginalized as workers and as couples of patriarchal families.

The history reveals that women subordination is neither a natural nor inherent state of affairs but a social phenomenon constructed. According to Engels (1884/1972) due to matrilinealism, there was relatively higher female authority in earlier communal societies. But the rise of personal property and patriarchy also created the systematic weakening of women and their autonomy and social power. This patriarchal hierarchy has since been strengthened by the regulated openness to resources, culturally formed gender standards, and limited women involvement in socio-economic lives.

In this context the family becomes a key point of intersection of economic and ideological forces. Marxist feminists believe that capitalist systems rely on unpaid household and reproductive labor of women to maintain the labor force, and that patriarchal ideology will keep them reliant and subordinate (Barrett, 1980). Consequently, inequality influences the family structures and tends to lead to the creation of emotional stress, alienation and the slow destruction of relations. In this regard, the economic independence turns out to be a condition of women emancipation as it will

help women to oppose the patriarchal dominance and renegotiate the power relations in the home.

The theory will be of particular interest in the socio-cultural environment in Afghanistan where centuries of war, political turmoil, and economic distress have perpetuated patriarchal values and gender disparities. Though the family is traditionally viewed as a basic unit of society, it is also the place where these structural tensions are put into action. The relationship within a family in such situations thus tends to be stressful, restructured or farther disintegrated.

Contemporary Afghan Anglophone fiction provides a critical lens for examining these dynamics. The multifaceted interplay between gender, power, as well as socio-economic conditions in the Afghan society can be depicted through the writings of such authors as Khaled Hosseini. Hosseini introduces the lived experiences of women as a form of patriarch domination, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) to show how systemic inequality has chronic emotional, psychological and relational effects that exude the integrity of family unity.

In this context, the process of familial *abscission* may seem to be gradual and controlled as opposed to that of a sudden discontinuity. It is a result of combined forces of patriarchal control, as well as economic dependence, through the expression of emotional withdrawal, limited agency, and limited existence in relationship. The family is both a place of repression and a place of expression with a structurality that is upheld in and eroded within.

Combining the biological notion of *abscission* with the Marxist feminist theory (Barrett, 1980, the given analysis creates the comprehensive analytic paradigm to interpret familial disintegration in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). It claims that the breakdown of family relations is not a thematic factor but rather a structural process brought about by the interplay of gender, class and ideological pressures. Familial *abscission* thereby becomes a normalized and systemic phenomenon, which is based on the intersection of patriarchy with capitalism.

Ultimately, this study contributes to broader debates in literary, gender, and social theory by demonstrating how literature reflects and critiques the complexities of human relationships under conditions of inequality. It positions *abscission* as a critical analytical lens for understanding the gradual and regulated fragmentation of familial bonds, offering new insights into power, resistance, and relational transformation in contemporary Afghan fiction.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To examine how patriarchal structures and socio-economic conditions contribute to the gradual *abscission* of familial bonding in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khaled Hosseini.

2. To analyze how Marxist feminist theory explains gendered oppression, emotional alienation, and structural inequalities in the disintegration of family relationships in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007).

1.2. Research Questions

1. How do patriarchal structures and socio-economic conditions lead to the gradual *abscission* of familial bonding in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007)?
2. How does Marxist feminist theory interpret gendered oppression and emotional alienation in the breakdown of family relationships in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007)?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This research has considerable theoretical, methodological, and contextual importance, because it proposes a new interdisciplinary paradigm of interpreting family disintegration in literature. With the use of the concept of *abscission*, which initially originated within the context of plant physiology, as a key analytical paradigm, the study contributes to a distinct and novel approach to the psychological process of the deterioration of family relationships. As far as the researcher is aware, the concept of *abscission* was first systematically introduced and applied in a literary context by Umair and Ahmad (2026) in their study, specifically in the analysis of familial relations. This theoretical innovation enlarges the context of literary theory as well as introduces new possibilities of interdisciplinary investigation by connecting the biological metaphor with the analysis of the socio-cultural context and the text.

Although the current literature tends to see familial disintegration as something immediate, distressing, or accidental, this paper redefines familial disintegration in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini as a process that is gradual, structured, and systematically produced. It asserts that family ties do not break abruptly but become worn out over time with the continued experience of patriarchy, financial reliance, war, and control of ideas. Through this, the research improves the knowledge base regarding the strengths of gender; class and ideology as a latent processes that legitimize and reinforce the gradual erosion of family relations.

Contextually, the paper takes up Afghan Anglophone fiction especially *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, in order to explore the ways in which patriarchal power, material wealth, and socio political upheavals influence household life. In this context, family relations are being constantly built, put under tension, and broken down in the conditions of conflict, insecurity, and inequality. The experience of women is also prefigured in the study and is typically sidelined in dominant literary and cultural discourses since authors refused to acknowledge the emotional and psychological hardships of women.

Moreover, this study provides evidence to Marxist feminist scholarship by enhancing the argument that family forms are deeply-rooted in extended economic, ideological and gendered forms of power. It displays that family disintegration is not an individual or a solitary event but a structural effect of co-existing forces of capitalism, patriarchy and ideology working within the family sphere.

The study is methodologically also progressive in terms of literary criticism showing how scientific ideas can be successfully re-contextualized in terms of humanities. The term of *abscission* is taken up by the scientific study of plants to analyze the mechanisms of emotional detachment, psychological alienation and structural fragmentation. This interdisciplinary perspective allows the better reading of the novel and goes against the conventional modes of interpretation that interpret family breakdown as sudden and not as the process.

2. Literature Review

This research is based on the critical approach to Marxist feminism and especially as expressed by Michele Barrett in *Women Oppression Today* (1980). Barrett explores the connectedness between capitalism and patriarchy with great focus being laid on how women have been oppressed structurally in both the economic, social and family contexts (Barrett, 1980). In this context, the family, in turn, becomes a paradigmatic space where the power of patriarchy collides with capitalist arrangements, turning the bonds of family into their presupposition and their objectification as a subject of gendered exploitation. Within the specific context of the Afghan Anglophone fiction, where the socio-economic crisis and the political unrest are rampant, this approach gains an even more accurate meaning, and the roles of war and displacement, as well as the patriarchal norms, in disrupting the familial bond may be delicately investigated.

It builds after the early work of Barrett to adopt intersectional Marxism feminist approaches to the study of literature. An example of this approach is Colleen Lye (2023), which shows how Marxist feminist critique can help explain the socio-political and racial aspects of postcolonial and diasporic literature, see how the constructions of gender and classes inform narrative politics and characterization. The method of Lye emphasizes a strong need to place literature into the context of wider geopolitics, which would be very applicable to the surviving of the Afghan novels in their struggle with war, displacement, and socio-economic divides (Lye, 2023).

Victoria Baena (2022) goes on to add Marxist and feminist approaches to the politics of aesthetics by exploring how aesthetically mediated narrative forms contradict, challenge and reveal hegemonic socio-economic authority. Baena in his work outlines the role of literature in exposing imperial and capitalist violence and therefore the work can be used to comprehend how the disintegration of clans, families and gender roles have been present in the Afghan fiction (Baena, 2022).

In her article, Myka Tucker-Abramson (2021) places Marxist feminism in urban and cultural geographies, with a focus on how world capitalism affects families and social identities. Her readings reveal how the tearing of families is reflected in the literary texts, such as the Afghan stories, as a result of local patriarchal structures, as well as global forces of capitalism and Imperialism (Tucker-Abramson, 2021).

Sara Jane Bailes (2020) extends this framework to include Marxist feminism with the analysis of critical race and queer theory and how conflicting oppressions (economic, gendered and heteronormative) shape familial experiences. The approach, taken by Bailes, is in line with social realities of multiple layers represented in Afghan Anglophone novels, which supports the necessity to regard various dimensions of structural oppression as crucial to the study of family breakdowns (Bailes, 2020).

In this respect, familial *abscission* may be interpreted as the cross-sectional equilibrium of the forces of capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism, which is in line with the current theoretical paradigms that consider literature as a reflection of a product and criticism of socio-economic systems (Barrett, 1980; Lye, 2023; Tucker-Abramson, 2021).

Marxism refers to a political and economic ideology that works to free people who are oppressed by the powerful possessing the means of production by way of superstructures like law, religion, and means of production (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Primarily, Marxist theory outlines two main categories, namely, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat: the former have the means of social production, whereas the latter depends on selling their labor to survive (Marx & Engels, 1848/1967). Capitalism allows the bourgeoisie to impose excess value on the labor of the proletariat, thus continuing the inequality within the system and oppressing classes (Bertens, 2008).

Economic exploitation, which is the basis of the Marxist analysis goes beyond material deprivation to the structural surveillance, control, and alienation. According to Marx and Engels, the proletariat is not only subjected to direct power, but also the machinery and organizational forms of production, and they highlight the dehumanizing nature of capitalist labor (Marx and Engels, 1848/1967).

Marxist feminism goes beyond the conventional Marxist criticism by underlining the aspect of gendered labor exploitation. According to Marxists feminists, capitalistic societies base on unpaid domestic work of women to generate work force as well as maintaining family stability (Lokaneeta, 2001). This is explained in greater detail in Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1972) that demonstrates how this patriarchal control in the nuclear family makes sure that property is passed on and the women are subordinate. Engels notes that matrilineal societies before capitalist systems enabled women to have more freedoms, but the emergence of

monogamy and a private property unit led to patriarch control encompassing women to household chores and childcare (Engels, 1972).

Marxist feminism thereby establishes the family life as a place of economic nature: the nuclear family is one of the places where the labour of women occurs to exploit it to support both patriarchal and capitalistic orders at the same time. This lens is useful in explaining the structural vulnerabilities of women and ensuing *abscission* of family relationships in the Afghan context where socio-economic crises and patriarchal norms dominate (Barrett, 1980; Lokaneeta, 2001).

Although, the philosophy of Marx elaborated on the class struggle, critics note that it had little focus on the issue of woman domestic work and economic empowerment. Subjugation of women, as sees feminists like Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1989) and Kate Millett (1970) is not just economic but also psychological and sexual and to avert such subjugation we should be critical of the cultural aspects of patriarchy. The framework by Engels is however still very effective especially in the analysis of the economic and social set up, which has sustained the oppression of women such as deprivation, physical assaults and lack of autonomy (Brewer, 2004; Smith, 1997).

The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khaled Hosseini has become the target of an enormous amount of critical focus, focusing both on feminist, postcolonial, sociological and ideological views. A significant strand of criticism asks the question of how the women of Afghanistan, patriarchy, war and family have been represented in the novel and whether the novel has strengthened or refuted the myths one has about the Muslim world as held by their western counterparts. In *New Orientalism in Popular Fiction and Memoir*, Fitzpatrick (as cited in Lam, 2009) proposes a theory, which suggests that contemporary narratives of Muslim societies pose a danger to recreate the binaries of the Orientals: Eastern societies are perceived as natural and repressive, whereas Western values are perceived as emancipatory. Lam (2009) counters this by saying that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) cannot be confined to New Orientalism because the representation of the Afghanistan men and women is more accurate. Lam continues to emphasize those not all misogynistic male characters but rather that the text itself is a sign of the restrictions of a society at war and not cultural essentialism.

There is a great deal of literature on how women suffer in the hands of war, patriarchy and political unrest. Hussain (2015) emphasizes that violence, sexual assault; humiliation and rape are direct outcomes of political and religious war that support patriarchal structures that make women vulnerable. Nonetheless, this is not a story of suffering that does not resist, and women also prove to be resilient and surviving in the face of systemic oppression. In the same way, Sayuti (2014) focuses on the analysis of both Mariam and Laila as sub-altern characters stating that their oppression extends

across various spheres such as education, healthcare, laws, and household. Although Mariam and Laila are initially characterized by patience and endurance, respectively, resistance, both eventually confront patriarchal domination, signaling a shift toward agency.

To further expand on this view, Soraya (2015) citing Spivak's notion of the subaltern finds that both Mariam and Laila are voiceless female representation in a patriarchal society gradually experiencing self-awareness. Philip (2016), also states that despite the fact the two women belong to different socio-economic groups; they connect with each other with similarity of their oppression so female bond becomes a of crucial resistance. This argument is furthered by Kollmeier (2013), who insists that the oppression of women in the novel surpasses cultural borders, making it a feminist issue of universal scope and not a provincial issue of Afghan identity.

Feminist resistance and the development of identity is a concern of other scholars. The relationship between Mariam and Laila, as understood by Yan-qing (2011), is a turnover between oppression and awakening whereby both characters are transformed into objectification and, later, to self-realization. Using the Marxist perspective, Pittoyo (2016) applies the concept of rebellion to women, which he perceives as radical and symbolic opposition to the structures of patriarchy. Similarly, Yawari (2011) draws parallels between *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *The Color Purple* by stating that both works portray the transition of women out of oppression to the self-identity against the backdrop of intersecting race, gender, and social disparities.

Several studies situate the novel within Afghanistan's socio-political and historical context. Sentov (2011) stresses that it is a story that crosses decades of political unrest, whether it is the Soviet invasion or the Taliban rule showing how macro-level violence penetrates the domestic life. According to Sagayararani (2016), the themes of the domestic violence, war, marriage oppression, and gender inequality are major, but the author also examines the symbolic representations, like putting on the burqa and kolba as the signs of female oppression. Yoharatnam (2014) also further brings out the psychological, emotional, and physical pain of Afghan women in Taliban rule.

Current scholarly research on gender discrimination is at its core. Nurul (2015) describes physical and psychological violence, limited mobility, stereotyping of women, and limited access to education and healthcare as four main types of discrimination in the novel. Bizheng (2016) describes education as an essential tool of women empowerment, whereas Boonpromkul (2015) explores the role of burqa, polygyny, and motherhood as institutional mechanisms of women subjugation.

The interpretive views are also expanded by comparative and sociological readings. As Silima (2013) contrasts *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *The God of Small Things*, women in both texts are structurally suppressed in patriarchal systems. According to

Mahanani (2014), the novel reflects the socio-political reality of Afghanistan to a real extent, which contributes to its sociological credibility. Bi-Wu (2008) lays emphasis on the linguistic structures to indicate that language builds up the oppression and forms tragic female identities.

The studies of critical discourse are also very insightful. When speaking of the discursive violence of this model, Khan (2016) shows that power works in relation to discourse, ideology, gender hierarchy, and institutions and explains that discourse is the most effective as it includes Afghan women and children as its most successful victims. Awan and Ali (2012) discuss the postcolonial language strategies in the novel and place it in the context of postcolonial literary traditions.

Lastly, ideological and cultural criticism like Qamar and Shakeel (2015) censure the portrayal of marriage in the novel on the grounds that at times it is congruous with the Western stereotypes. Other scholars however understand it as a realist portrayal of the Afghan society that has been influenced by war, displacement, and political conflict. Comprehensively, themes of patriarchy, war, gender oppression, domestic violence, and resistance by women are regularly predictable in existing scholarship on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). Nevertheless, the overwhelming number of studies treats such problems as distinct analysis units, i.e. concentrating on feminism, subalternity, discourse, history or sociological violence, but do not construct them as one, one unified theoretical exposition of the break in relationships.

This creates a clear conceptual gap for a Marxist feminist framework that understands familial disintegration not as an abrupt or isolated event but as a systematic, gradual, and structurally regulated process. In this context, the concept of *abscission* of familial bonding provides a new analytical lens to interpret how gender, class, ideology, and socio-political instability collectively contribute to the slow erosion of family structures.

By combining a biological metaphor of regulated separation with Marxist feminist theory, this study extends existing scholarship toward a more interdisciplinary, process-oriented, and structural understanding of familial fragmentation in Afghan Anglophone fiction.

2.1. Research Gap

Despite extensive scholarship on Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), there remains a significant gap in the study of familial *abscission*, understood as the systematic disintegration of family bonds under intersecting patriarchal, economic, ideological, and socio-political pressures. While existing studies have explored aspects of gender oppression, domestic labor, and patriarchal control, these analyses often isolate these themes rather than examining their combined effects on the structural breakdown of families. Moreover, although Marxist feminist frameworks have been applied to

understand women's subordination and the exploitation of labor, very few studies explicitly employ this lens to interrogate how capitalism, patriarchy, and socio-political instability converge to produce the gradual erosion of familial relationships. Similarly, cultural factors such as Pashtunwali codes, honour norms, and the enforcement of gendered social expectations have been studied largely in isolation from economic hardships and broader societal conflict, leaving the multi-dimensional processes driving familial fragmentation underexplored. Furthermore, the concept of *abscission* itself borrowed from plant physiology and metaphorically understood as a regulated shedding of connections has rarely been applied in literary scholarship to describe how family ties are systematically weakened or severed in response to structural forces. Consequently, there is a pressing need for research that integrates these dimensions, examining how gender discrimination, economic deprivation, cultural expectations, and conflict collectively facilitate the disintegration of family structures in Afghan fiction, thereby providing a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of familial *abscission* as both a social phenomenon and a literary motif. Consequently, there is a clear need for research that integrates these dimensions to examine how intersecting forces of gender discrimination, economic deprivation, ideological domination, and socio-political instability collectively facilitate the gradual disintegration of familial structures in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of familial *abscission* as both a theoretical and literary framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research design of this paper is qualitative, interpretive, and literary-analytical type, which is the most appropriate in the research to investigate the socio-cultural, economic, and gender aspects of family disintegration in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini (2007). A qualitative method allows grasping the textual sense with its constructions in terms of narrative elements, the formation of a character, symbolism, and thematic issues that concern family, gender, and power (Creswell, 2018).

A close reading of the chosen novel is conducted with the help of the literary-analytical method. This method concerns analysis of language and use, narrative style, symbolism and point of view to understand how the text portrays emotional and psychological and social effects of the existence of patriarchy, war and economic deprivation on family dynamics (Barry, 2009). With this method of analysis, this paper examines how literary elements indicate and shape the slow decay of family relationships.

One of the core elements of the methodology is close reading which enables performing the textual analysis in depth concerning major passages related to Mariams

and Laila. It helps the researcher to follow the way in which Hosseini embodies the complex inner emotionality, external pressure and the changing distributive relationships in domestic settings. The close reading process also makes it easier to understand how personal agency is formed, limited or opposed to oppressive socio-political settings (Bailes, 2020).

3.2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in Marxist Feminism, a critical theoretical approach that examines the interconnected systems of capitalism and patriarchy, both of which operate together to sustain the structural oppression of women. According to this framework, women subordination is not an inherent phenomenon but is historically and materially created by economic, social, cultural and ideological frameworks that perpetuate gender inequality in both domestic and political arenas.

Marxist feminism uses Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, especially their work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), to argue that the roots of women oppression lie in their economical reliance on men and the lack of payment of reproductive and domestic labor by them. These modes of labor are fundamental to production of the workforce and, by extension, capitalist production. In this view the family is not a neutral or purely emotional organization but a central ideological institution that recreates the hierarchies of classes and genders making the domestic role of women exploited but structural to the continuation of patriarchal capitalism.

A significant contribution to this study is Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today* (1980), which expands Marxist feminist analysis by emphasizing the role of ideology, culture, and social relations in sustaining women's oppression. Barrett emphasizes the interaction of kinship systems, gendered expectations, and a sexual division of labor with economic systems to strengthen patriarchy. The idea of the double oppression of women as both an object of exploitation in the capitalist economy and a subordinate in patriarchal families is especially applicable to the Afghan socio-political reality due to the combination of war, poverty and deeply rooted patriarchal values that further undermine the status of women along with the stability and integrity of relationships in families.

In this theoretical approach, the concept of familial *abscission* has been used as a theoretical approach in explaining the gradual disintegration of family systems. Instead of focusing on the family breakdown as a sudden break the *abscission* theory views the process of withdrawal of emotions and relationships as gradual, progressive, and structurally determined. This representational extension from biological processes allows a nuanced analysis of how familial bonds weaken under constant pressures of war, poverty, a patriarchal power structure, emotional violence, and socio-cultural ideology.

This framework facilitates a critical interpretation of the role of patriarchal and capitalist regimes in defining the experience of women and the lasting disintegration of family bonds, as well as creating interpretive points at which resistance and agency may be practiced as part of the Afghan Anglophone fiction context.

3.3.Data Analysis

The section explores the issue of familial bonding in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) through a Marxist feminist lens, arguing that family relationships erode gradually under the pressures of patriarchy, economic hardship, war, and cultural ideology. Through Mariam and Laila's experiences, the household emerges as a site of power, exploitation, and emotional decline rather than security. Women's unpaid labor and dependency reinforce subordination, leading to alienation and psychological fragmentation. War and socio-political instability further intensify this breakdown. Overall, the novel portrays familial disintegration as a slow, structured process shaped by intersecting systems of patriarchy and capitalism, while also revealing moments of resilience.

3.4. Emotional and Psychological Abscission

The emotional closeness and mental stability are the essential of familial *abscission* in the novel. The fact that Mariam grew up illegitimate and socially exclude herself places her in the structure of emotional vulnerability. This state is enhanced when she is forcibly married to Rasheed and a process begins in which emotional attachment gives way to fear, loneliness, and hopelessness.

"She could not remember the last time he had smiled at her... or spoken to her without reproach."

This scene is an indication of the acceptance of emotional barrenness to the marital relationship. The lack of affection is not sudden and must have been constructed through years of lack of care and of hostility. Mariam develops a psychological condition accordingly, internalizing her marginalization and losing the sense of expectation to receive anything from an emotional perspective. The result of her silence is not only a survival strategy but also a sign of *abscission* that is, an indication that emotional associations have been systematically weakened.

Likewise, the psychological development of Laila portrays the functions of *abscission* of constant subject to oppression and turmoil. Having survived by being pushed into marriage with Rasheed, Laila feels much trapped:

"She felt like a prisoner in her own home."

Through this metaphor, the domestic space is transformed into a place of imprisonment, instead of home. Psychological burden of those conditions is evidenced by the sense of alienation, hopelessness, and exhaustion. Notably, such effects are never

immediate; they develop with time as the *abscission* process is regulated because of persistent pressure instead of unforeseen rupture.

The interplay between emotional repression and psychological fragmentation reveals how familial relationships deteriorate from within. Emotional bonds are not violently severed but slowly eroded, as individuals withdraw affectively in response to sustained oppression. This aligns with the concept of *abscission* as a controlled and normalized process, where detachment becomes an adaptive response to structural constraints.

3.5. Patriarchal Domination and the Regulation of Domestic Space

Patriarchal authority operates as a central mechanism in the process of familial *abscission*, establishing the relationships based on the control, violence and ideology imposing. Rasheed represents such authority, making the household a micro-world of patriarchal power, efficiency that dominates companionship.

“A woman’s face is her husband’s business only.”

The ideological premises of gender hierarchy are summed up in this statement, where women are deprived of agency and made objects of male possession. The obligation of the burqa, limitations on movement and implementation of compliance function as tools through which patriarchal power is upheld. These practices thoroughly challenge expectation, communication, and emotive connection inside the family.

This process is further magnified with physical violence. Rasheed abuses his son/s by humiliating and beating him, which induces fear in the family which prevents feelings to be expressed. Among the most vivid ones is one where he makes Mariam forcefully chew a pebble as punishment:

“He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open... He dropped a handful of pebbles into it.”

This violence is not just physical but highly symbolic where women are dehumanized and silenced in the domestic context. This kind of repetitive behavior helps to diminish relationships bonds over time, with fear coming to take the place of intimacy and obedience taking the place of communication.

According to the Marxist feminist approach, the issue of patriarchal domination is not a detached phenomenon but cannot be entangled into the broader economic and ideological systems. These forces are replicated within the family, which guarantees the sustainability of gendered hierarchies. Familial *abscission* is, in this regard, produced structurally by the mechanisms of a continuous working of patriarchal power.

3.6. Economic Dependency and Structural Subordination

Economic enslavement plays a vital role in facilitating familial *abscission* by limiting women’s agency and reinforcing their subordination. Mariam and Laila’s

powerlessness to achieve financial independence traps them within tyrannical domestic engagements, where separation is not a practicable option.

“Where would I go? What could I do?”

This rhetorical question is a consequence of the material restrictions on which they base their situation. Both women are forced to suffer abuse and exploitation because they cannot access resources, education, and employment. The family of their dependency is not only economical but also relational because it constrains their ability to redefine and get themselves out of their position in the family.

The novel further brings into limelight the importance of house married labor that supported the home. Mariam and Laila do the crucial work of cooking, cleaning, care giving but their efforts go unnoticed and are underestimated. This is similar to the Marxist feminist critique of the exploitation of labor by women in the domestic environment to achieve the goal of supporting the entire economic systems.

Emotional exhaustion and detachment is the end result of this exploitation. They gradually lose their emotional attachment to the family as their labor is demanded everywhere without recognition and rewarding. This retreat is indicative of the *abscission* process where the relationships are in the process of being undermined due to prolonged structural inequality.

3.7. War, Violence, and External Pressures

Socio-political conditions of war and insecurity within Afghanistan go a long way in boosting the process of familial *abscission*. The novel places individual relationships in a larger context of violence, in which violence in the outside world intrudes into domestic life.

“The streets were filled with gunfire... Kabul had become a city of fear.”

War similarly increases the hardship of the economy making it more dependent and restricting forms of resistance. Socio-economic instability influences Rasheed in many ways, and it is these frustrations that are frequently transferred to Mariam and Laila, reinforcing the dynamics of domestic abuse. In this way, the external conflict is internalized within the family and it enhances relational breakdown.

Within the framework of *abscission*, war acts as an environmental force, which enhances the regulated process of separation. It is not the direct cause of disintegration of families but rather aggravates the situation in which disintegration occurs; this indicates interdependence between the sphere of personal and the detail of politics.

3.8. Ideological Control and Internalization of Oppression

Ideological frameworks have an essential role to play in perpetuating familial *abscission* by stabilizing and validating the oppression. Cultural norms about honor, obedience, and gender roles influence the way characters behave and perceive themselves, as it strengthens their subordination.

“She would endure. She would not complain.”

This process of endurance being internalized is an indication of how far the ideology can go into the mind of the individual. Females are socialized into accepting suffering as a responsibility, which prevents action and continues to keep them silent. These internalized beliefs lead to the weakening of emotional relationships over time, as people override their needs and wants to the satisfaction of compliance.

The notion of honor, especially, serves as an effective governing power. It dictates acceptable behavior and reinforces gendered expectations, keeping women within the accepted roles. This system of ideology intersects with economic and patriarchal systems, resulting in a multi-layered order of control that influences the relations with the members of the family.

In this context, *abscission* is not a process happening externally but even internally. Emotional detachment is a process in which people adjust to the ideological constraints and as they move away to relationships which no longer give them a mutual recognition and support, the emotional detachment takes place gradually.

3.9. Female Solidarity and the Reconfiguration of Familial Bonds

Generally, in spite of all oppressive forces in the novel, there are also instances of change and resistance, especially in the relationship between Mariam and Laila. Their relationship transforms into suspicion to strong feeling of emotions and provides another pattern of family attachment.

“Mariam saw now how much a woman could love another woman.”

This connection disrupts traditional patriarchal concept of family through solidarity, care and mutual support. Their relationship is founded on empathy and experience unlike in the relationships they have with Rasheed which are dominated and fearful.

The unity also makes it easy to engage in resistance activities which culminate into the ultimate sacrifice of Mariam to save Laila. This act can be viewed as a reconstitution of the family relationships, with the conventional models being broken down and substituted by the new, different ways of relations.

The cumulative analysis shows that familial disintegration in the novel can be viewed as a process of *abscission* that is gradual, controlled and produced structurally. The effects of the interaction of the four forces of patriarchy, capitalism, ideology, and conflict, as time passes, are emotional detachment, psychological fragmentation, and relational breakdown.

The family itself is not presented as a stable or natural institution but rather it is characterized as a dynamic organization that is continuously being influenced by external influences and internal forces. The relationships are preserved, strained and finally

reshaped in this context and that *abscission* is highly adaptive as a loss and reconfiguration process.

Significantly, oppression and resistance coexist in the novel as well. Systemic forces are leading to the erosion of the familial bonds, but individuals encounter these limitations by means of solidarity and agency. This dichotomy highlights the perplexity of familial *abscission* and underscores the role of *abscission* as disintegration as well as a locality of transformation.

Conclusively, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* portrays familial *abscission* as the key mechanism in which the interaction of gender, classes, ideology, and conflict is expressed. As the novel narrates the lives of Mariam and Laila in detail, it shows how family ties can be worn down over time due to long-term structural pressures, as well as the possibility of survival and reinvention.

By applying a Marxist feminist lens, this analysis highlights the structural nature of familial disintegration, challenging interpretations that view it as sudden or incidental. Instead, it positions *abscission* as a critical framework for understanding the slow, systematic, and normalized processes through which emotional and relational bonds are weakened, reshaped, and, at times, reimagined.

4. Conclusion

This research investigated familial disintegration in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) through the combined framework of Marxist feminism and the concept of familial *abscission*. The study demonstrated that family breakdown in the novel does not occur as a sudden or isolated event but emerges as a slow, structured, and continuous process shaped by intersecting forces of patriarchy, economic dependence, ideological regulation, and socio-political instability.

The analysis revealed that domestic space functions as a central site where power is exercised and emotional bonds are gradually weakened. Within Rasheed's household, women's unpaid domestic and emotional labor became a mechanism of structural exploitation, leading to psychological exhaustion, emotional withdrawal, and relational alienation. At the same time, war and external violence intensified this process by penetrating the private sphere and transforming the home into a space of insecurity and survival rather than intimacy.

From a Marxist feminist perspective, the study confirmed that familial relationships are deeply embedded within systems of inequality that reproduce gendered and economic hierarchies. Ideological structures further reinforced this oppression by normalizing silence, obedience, and emotional suppression, ensuring the continuity of patriarchal control within family life.

However, the study also found that even within this process of *abscission*, moments of resistance and emotional reconstitution emerged. The relationship between

Mariam and Laila illustrated how shared suffering can generate solidarity, allowing women to reconstruct emotional bonds outside patriarchal authority. Mariam's final act of resistance further signified a radical redefinition of agency, transforming familial disintegration into a moment of ethical and emotional awakening.

Overall, the study concluded that familial *abscission* provides a useful analytical framework for understanding how family systems are gradually eroded under structural pressures. It highlights that in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), familial bonds are not simply destroyed but are slowly reshaped, weakened, and at times reconfigured through oppression and resistance simultaneously.

References

- Addicott, F. T. (1982). *Abscission*. University of California Press.
- Awan, M. S., & Ali, M. (2012). Postcolonial discourse in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 5(2), 45–60.
- Baena, V. (2022). Marxism, feminism, and aesthetics in contemporary literature. *Cultural Critique*, 118(1), 33–52.
- Bailes, S. J. (2020). Marxist feminism and intersectionality in literary studies. *Feminist Theory Review*, 12(3), 201–218.
- Barrett, M. (1980). *Women's oppression today: The Marxist/feminist encounter*. Verso.
- Barry, P. (2009). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester University Press.
- Beauvoir, S. de. (1989). *The second sex* (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Bertens, H. (2008). *Literary theory: The basics*. Routledge.
- Bi-Wu. (2008). Linguistic construction of identity in Afghan literature. *Language and Literature Studies*, 6(1), 55–70.
- Bizheng, L. (2016). Education and empowerment in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). *Journal of Gender Studies*, 9(2), 77–89.
- Boonpromkul, N. (2015). Patriarchy and female identity in Afghan fiction. *Asian Literary Review*, 6(4), 112–129.
- Brewer, R. (2004). *Marxist feminism and social reproduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Engels, F. (1972). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. International Publishers. (Original work published 1884)
- Haiying, Z. (2012). Deconstruction of gender binaries in Afghan literature. *Literary Criticism Journal*, 8(1), 54–70.
- Hosseini, K. (2007). *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). Riverhead Books.

- Hussain, S. (2015). Gender violence and war in Afghan fiction. *South Asian Literary Studies*, 11(2), 101–120.
- Khan, A. (2016). Critical discourse analysis of gender in Afghan literature. *Language & Power Journal*, 4(3), 66–82.
- Kollmeier, K. (2013). Universal feminism in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). *Comparative Literature Review*, 7(2), 88–99.
- Lam, C. (2009). New orientalism in popular fiction. *Journal of Postcolonial Inquiry*, 3(1), 25–41.
- Lokaneeta, J. (2001). Marxist feminism and domestic labor. *Social Theory Journal*, 15(2), 134–150.
- Lye, C. (2023). Marxist feminist approaches in postcolonial literature. *Modern Critical Theory*, 15(1), 44–62.
- Mahanani, R. (2014). Sociological realism in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). *Journal of Literary Sociology*, 7(1), 45–60.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1967). *The communist manifesto*. Penguin. (Original work published 1848)
- Meiling, L. (2015). Narrative structure in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). *Journal of Narrative Studies*, 10(2), 99–115.
- Meyers, D. (2001). Social rupture and identity fragmentation. *Philosophy & Society*, 12(3), 77–90.
- Millett, K. (1970). *Sexual politics*. Doubleday.
- Nurhasanah, S. (2011). Women's independence and patriarchal control in Afghan fiction. *Gender Studies Quarterly*, 5(2), 88–102.
- Nurul, A. (2015). Gender discrimination in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). *International Journal of Literature Studies*, 6(2), 59–74.
- Osborne, D. J. (1989). Plant physiology and *abscission* processes. *Botanical Review*, 55(2), 113–129.
- Philip, T. (2016). Female solidarity in war narratives. *Gender and Literature Journal*, 8(1), 40–58.
- Pitoyo, A. (2016). Marxist perspectives on women resistance. *Literary Marxism Journal*, 3(2), 55–70.
- Qamar, A., & Shakeel, S. (2015). Marriage representation in Afghan fiction. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(1), 91–105.
- Rahimi, A. (2008). *The patience stone*. Other Press.
- Sagayarani, S. (2016). Themes of war and gender oppression in Afghan literature. *Asian Literary Studies*, 10(3), 112–128.
- Sayuti, S. (2014). Subaltern women in Afghan fiction. *South Asian Review*, 35(2), 120–138.

- Sentov, M. (2011). War and narrative in Afghan literature. *War & Culture Studies*, 2(4), 66–82.
- Silima, R. (2013). Comparative study of patriarchal oppression in fiction. *Comparative Literature Review*, 6(2), 77–95.
- Smith, H. (1997). *Marxism and feminist theory*. Routledge.
- Soraya, N. (2015). Subaltern voice in Hosseini's fiction. *Literary Feminist Review*, 5(2), 44–60.
- Taylor, A. (2001). Developmental regulation in plant separation processes. *Journal of Botany*, 45(3), 201–218.
- Tucker-Abramson, M. (2021). Marxist feminism and global capitalism. *Cultural Political Economy*, 9(1), 1–19.
- Umair, M., & Ahmad, I. (2026). Abscission of familial bonding: A Marxist feminist analysis of *The Patience Stone*. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(1), 714–726. <https://doi.org/10.63878/jalt2040>
- Yamin, S. (2010). Sisterhood in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). *Women's Studies International*, 12(1), 33–49.
- Yan-qing, L. (2011). Female awakening in Afghan literature. *Asian Feminist Studies*, 4(3), 77–93.
- Yoharatnam, R. (2014). Psychological trauma in Afghan women's narratives. *Journal of Trauma Literature*, 6(2), 88–102.