

## MULTIPLE FORMS OF OPPRESSION ON WOMEN IN MUNA MASYARI'S DAMAR KAMBANG AND KHALED HOSSEINI'S A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

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### Abstract

*The aim of this study is to show multiple forms of oppression experienced by female characters in Muna Masyari's Damar Kambang and Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. Muna Masyari unveils Madurese patriarchal practice in the forms of wedding tradition and bet in the bull race in which honor and dignity are upheld above all else. Cebbhing, a 14-year-old girl from Karang Penang Village, became the victim of the wedding tradition. She was caught in the struggle of life caused by the unilateral decisions of her parents. Similar to Damar Kambang, Khaled Hosseini in A Thousand Splendid Suns tells the story of poor, uneducated women who have to go through all kinds of oppression and who have to endure the hardships of life. The story is narrated from the two female characters Mariam and Laila. Using feminist literary approach, these two novels are scrutinized by applying close reading method. Based on the analysis, the forms of oppression found in the two novels are marginalization and violence. The inferior position of women is a result of male domination in all aspects of life. It is concluded that women are oppressed economically, traditionally and ideologically. Patriarchal ideology exposed in these novels shows that women are like goods that can be exchanged for debt or losing bets.*

**Keywords:** *feminist literary criticism; multiple forms of oppression; patriarchal ideology*

### A. Introduction

Muna Masyari's Damar Kambang and Khaled Hossaini's A Thousand Splendid Suns are stories about women living in a patriarchal society that exists in Indonesian and Afghan society. Patriarchal ideology causes women to always be in the area of domesticity. Patriarchy according to Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan (1991: 25-26) is the power of the father or patriarch. It relates to the social system in which the father controls all members of his family, all property and economic resources, and makes all important decisions. In line with this social system, there is a belief or ideology that men have a higher position than women; that women must be controlled by men, and are part of men's property. Moral and legal norms are also double standards which give more rights to men than women, in addition to being based on patriarchy.

The word patriarchy is also meant a system that oppresses and demeans women, because men dominate control over women, over their bodies, their sexuality, and their work in both the family and society. Because of this domination, women have no power over themselves. Men have the power to conquer, expand, and be aggressive. Physical differences that are received from birth are then strengthened by the hegemony of cultural structures, customs, traditions, education, and so on. It can be concluded that patriarchy emphasizes the power of the father/husband in terms of dominating, subordinating and discriminating against women; namely the dominance of parents (especially fathers) over children, husbands' domination over wives, inferiority of women, and stereotypic differences between men and women. In this case, men get a more dominant position and role that do not see women as creatures who have decisions toward themselves (Mills, 2009: 82). Meanwhile, women, because they do not have any power within a family, tend to experience various forms of oppression such as marginalization, exploitation and violence. These forms of oppression can be seen clearly in the two novels mention above. Cebbhing, a 14-year-old girl from Karang Penang Village, became the victim of the wedding tradition. She was caught in the struggle of life caused by the unilateral decisions of her parents. Similar to *Damar Kambang*, Mariam and Laila in Khaled Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have to go through all kinds of physical abuse of hitting, kicking and slapping, brutal beating, etc. They also struggle against the cruel and extremely sadistic Rasheed, and suffer all kinds of violence and subjected to his shifting mood and volatile temper.

What are experienced by female characters in these novels are analysed using feminist literary criticism. This criticism is expected to contribute to the study of literature and practically it is expected to enrich the readers' insight about the ins and outs of a literary work, especially a novel in terms of a critical study of feminist literature.

## **B. Methodology**

A research method can be interpreted as a way of working to understand the object that is the target of research. Because literary works are aesthetic facts that have their own characteristics, the methods used to approach them are also different. The method in literary studies has its own scientific measure which is determined by its characteristics as a system (Chamamah, 2003:19). The research on *Damar Kambang* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* relates to reading the text from a woman's point of view. A text research like this is called research with a women's perspective and is based on women's problems. The research is qualitative which emphasizes the subjective experience of the researchers as women to understand women's problems that appear in the text being analyzed (Handayani and Sugiarti, 2002:77-78,85). Thus, the most appropriate theory used in this research is feminist theory. The application of this theory has important benefits related to women's efforts to gain authority over themselves through a literary perspective. In this study, the writers conducted an interpretive reading of *Damar Kambang* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, then proceed with accumulating data in the form of texts related to the feminist perspective. Finally, the writers analyse the data texts based on feminist theory and approach.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. *Damar Kambang***

Like the color of a prism, *Damar Kambang*, Muna Masyari's first novel offers a variety of readings about traditions, especially the local culture in Madura. Starting from a torn marriage ritual, this book records the breakdown of relationships within the family sphere and socio-cultural relations that still have an influence there. The relationship between parents and children, kiai (Islamic religious leader) and santri (student of Islamic boarding school), to shamans and adherents of their occult beliefs seems

to be getting more and more tangled, overshadowed by egos of dignity, by honor, and the most heart breaking thing: the omission of violent behaviors.

In this novel, the story is focused on the two main characters, Chebbing, a 14-year-old girl, and Damar Kambang, a lantern that must be provided at wedding rituals and symbolically signifies the continuity of the household. In some parts of the novel, Damar Kambang is written as a mirror of wisdom in fostering husband and wife relationships; when the flame goes out, their ship is sunk.

The same thing happens to Chebbing. Her damar kambang fire is constantly dying when her wedding ceremony with her lover from another village, Kacong, is being held. Their marriage is annulled only because of a misunderstanding about the amount of the dowry, which infuriates Chebbing's parents. Madlawi, the father, feels that his self-esteem is insulted because the dowry for her daughter is only pillows and cakes, not the possessions that would later fill the couple's home. The relationship between the two families is fractured. The conflict then rolls up and shows the dark face of each character.

Kacong is angry and feels humiliated as a result of the unilateral cancellation. Sakrah, Kacong's uncle, suggests him to the shaman, Nom Matrah, to put a spell on Chebbing. His magic spell succeeds in making Chebbing want to always meet Kacong. She desperately travels alone to Kacong's house and make love.

The intimate relationship between Chebbing and Kacong, which they carries out in secret, angers Madlawi. He feels increasingly trampled on his dignity. He takes a shortcut: he secretly married Chebbing without a dowry to Ke Bulla, an Islamic religious leader, as his third wife.

In this novel, the readers do not find Chebbing's conscious choice. As a woman within the scope of the Madurese tradition, she seems not to put up a fight and is forced to follow what her parents and men want.

## ***2. Thousand Splendid Suns***

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is set in the war-torn neighborhoods of Kabul in 1990s. When battle upends her family, beautiful Laila must seek shelter, first in the home and then in the arms of her older neighbor. The story revolves around two women, Mariam and Laila, born 20 years apart, but whose lives are intertwined through the events of the novel.

Mariam (born in 1959) is the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy merchant named Jalil who has three wives and nine "legitimate" children. Mariam's mother, Nana, is a servant in Jalil's house whose affair with Jalil result in Mariam. As readers might expect, the three wives are less than enthused and Nana and Mariam are forced to live on the outskirts of town, making Nana a bitter often cruel person to Mariam.

The other main character is Laila (born in 1978) who lives in the same area as Mariam. Laila's story begins with her close friendship with a boy named Tariq who loses a leg to a Soviet land mine when he is 5 years old. Years later, with Kabul under constant rocket attacks, Laila's family decides to leave the city. During an emotional farewell, Laila and Tariq make love. Later, as her family is preparing to depart Kabul, a rocket kills her parents and severely injures Laila.

Through a series of mostly tragic circumstances, Mariam and Laila both end up married to a serious scumbag named Rasheed. Rasheed is an ignorant and mean-spirited person. He is described as an abusive husband. As the wives of Rasheed, Mariam and Laila find themselves together and the story deepens as these two women slowly learn first to live with each other and later to depend upon each other as they face almost daily challenges.

### 3. *Marginalization and Violence on Women Damar Kambang and A Thousand Splendid Suns*

#### a. *Marginalization in Damar Kambang and A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Marginalization means the overt actions or tendencies of human societies, where people who they perceive to be undesirable or without useful function are excluded. The people who are marginalized are outside the existing systems of protection and integration. In society, women are often marginalized. They are treated unfairly, not only at work, but also within her own family. Female family members do not have the same rights as men in making decisions in their families. A father will have absolute power over the life of his wife and children, as well as with boys and girls. The position of men who are considered higher will also have an impact on low education for women.

Marginalization of women occurs because of gender differences (Fakih, 2008:14). Attributes for male and female created by the society results in one party being marginalized (impoverished). The marginalization that occurs due to gender differences is created by a patriarchal society. The patriarchal system that is still entrenched in society causes women to continue to be made second humans after men. Their rights are generally neutered and their existence marginalized. Even not few of the women are treated unfairly by the law. Culture is one of the causes of women being marginalized. Culture itself includes issues of patriarchy ideology and stereotypes against women.

In Damar kambang, the issue of marginalization can be seen from how male characters treat female characters. Using three women's point of view, namely Nyai Marinten (Ke Bulla's second wife), Ibu Kacong, and Cebbhing, this novel tells how women are treated in a patriarchal culture. Women are not free to speak up to express their feelings and thoughts. It is also shown how customs and culture place and treat women who are like things.

“Sampean dengarkan saya, dia sudah mempertaruhkan rumah ini beserta isinya, dan kalah! Saya mengalahkannya!” Si Buntung mengelilingi suamiku dengan langkah pelan, “Sampean salah satu isi rumah ini, taiye? Jadi, mulai sekarang sampean ini bukan miliknya lagi! Tapi milik saya!” (Masyari, 2021: 8)

“...Kau ini Perempuan!” “Memangnya kenapa kalau perempuan?” Bukan sekali ini gerakku dibatasi karena aku seorang perempuan. Ayah-ibu sering melarangku dan mengatur ini-itu dengan alasan yang sama. (Masyari, 2021: 76)

The culture described in this novel is very patriarchal. In a part of Cebbhing's father screaming for her daughter, Kacong, who represents the younger generation, said that Cebbhing's father is more concerned with delivery and honor than Cebbhing; more concerned with tradition than cherishing Cebbhing; even more concerned with the lives of others than Cebbhing herself. At the same time the section on why Cebbhing runs away, actually Kacong is just as patriarchal as Cebbhing's father and other patriarchal men. He inherits Sakrah's way of thinking, to win prestige and dignity over his failure to marry by luring Cebbhing through an unrighteous way. Even worse, when Cebbhing's father comes looking for her daughter, Kacong even instigates Cebbhing by saying how bad the way his father treats Cebbhing is. He dares not go out with Cebbhing to meet her father and state that he still wants the failed marriage to be repaired.

Marginalization and powerlessness of women are also revealed in this novel. The story of a woman's journey after marriage is described in Nyai Marinten. Nyai Marinten has a very dark past, she is once a bet by her husband in a bull fight. Marinten (before becoming a Nyai) is never given an explanation, suddenly one day her husband comes with his victorious opponent and hands her over to them.



“Betapa rapuh hubungan yang diikat lalu dirantas sepotong lidah. Setelah talak dijatuhkan, simpul pernikahan rantas terurai, keduanya menjelma orang asing yang saling berpunggunan, beda jalan dan tujuan (Masyari, 2021: 10).”

“Di rumah itu, riwayatku tinggal kenangan. Pernikahan seperti kontrak sepihak dengan Tuhan yang bisa diakhiri hanya dengan gerak sekerat lidah (Masyari, 2021: 10).”

The above quotations show how a married woman is treated. Marinten’s husband leaves her after she is divorced and also makes her into bets and hands over to his opponent because the betting contract is more important than the marriage contract.

Like Damar Kambang, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* also talks about marginalisation and powerlessness of female characters. Through two female characters, Mariam and Leila, the oppression to women in Afghanistan and the injustice with which they are treated and how their only way to social status and approval is to bear a male heir are clearly depicted. Mariam is one of the saddest characters in this novel. Born as an illegitimate child to a very wealthy man, she has been called “harami” her whole life. “Harami” means a bastard child, Mariam has been shunned and discriminated and thought of as ignorant and worthless, even by her own birth father and her family. She is married to a man named Rasheed, who is violent, rude, abusive and just plain. Rasheed sees her only as a tool for breeding his heirs and mistreats severely abuses her, when it is found out that she is sterile. In domestic life, women do not have freedom in terms of reproduction. Everything is controlled by men (Bhasin, 1996: 6). The existence of controls or rules imposed on women in terms of reproduction makes women are marginalized in making these decisions. their rights are ignored. For being unable to give any offsprings to Rasheed, Mariam is considered like an object that can't think.

Rasheed chortled and shook his head, but Mariam thought she saw uncertainty in the way he crossed his arms, the way his eyes shifted. “You know nothing, do you? You're like a child. Your brain is empty. There is no information in it.” (Hosseini, 2010: 102)

When Rasheed takes a second wife, Laila, the two women despise each other at first, but soon unite against their husband's verbal and physical and emotional abuse. Mariam, being self-sacrificial, often tries to protect Laila and bears the brunt of Rasheed's anger. Mariam and Leila’s journey amidst various domestic difficulties show readers how women are marginalized

#### *b. Violence in Damar Kambang and A Thousand Splendid Suns*

According to (Bograd, 1988) violence against women results from gender inequality on the societal level. The more unequal women are compared to men in a society, the more likely men are to be violent toward women. The status of women is a complex, multidimensional concept.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, violence experienced by Miriam and Laila because of gender inequality in society. They have to go through all kinds of physical abuse of hitting, kicking and slapping and brutal beating done by their husband the cruel extremely sadistic Rasheed. They suffered from all kind of violence and subjected to Rasheed shifting mood and volatile temper. They are shown in the following quotations.

“There was always something, some minor thing that would infuriate him, because no matter what she did to please him, no matter how thoroughly she submitted to his wants and demands, it wasn't enough. She could not give him his son back. In this most essential way, she had failed him-seven times she had failed him-and now she was nothing but a burden to him. She could see it in the way he looked at her, when he looked at her. She was a burden to him. (Hosseini, 2010: 103)

Mariam had learned to harden herself against his scorn and reproach, his ridiculing reprimanding. But this fear she had no control over. All the years and still she shivered with

fright when her husband, Rasheed “ was sneering, tightening the belt around his fist, the creaking of the leather, the glint in his bloodshot eyes” (Hosseini, 2010: 104)

"I should have known that you'd corrupt her," Rasheed spat at Mariam. He swung the belt, testing it against his own thigh. The buckle jingled loudly.  
"Stop it, basl" the girl said. "Rasheed, you can't do this."

Damar Kambang also portrays violence against women. For parents, having a virgin is more of a responsibility than having a boy. The way to educate them is to use violence in the form of draggings and beatings. "Ayah semakin kasar menyeretku. Nom Matrah mengikuti. Ketika menuruni tanjakan, Kembali aku nyaris jatuh. Ayah tak peduli. (Masyari, 2021: 96)... Tanpa banyak mengumpat lagi, Ayah menyeretku turun dari mobil. Bilah kayu sebesar dan sepanjang lengannya dipukulkan ke betisku berkali-kali. (Masyari, 2021: 97).

The honor of the family is the burden of their daughter. Once a family name is tarnished, a person's lifetime will be tarnished and will not disappear. That's why, the marriage rope becomes the strongest binder to limit girl's movement, before she grows and proliferates, before she is able to tighten the veins to rebel. (Hosseini, 2010: 11). At the age of fourteen, parents have stretched the ropes to tie their daughter in marriage to a man she does fully know. She is submissive, as her friends who first received a similar decision. (Hosseini, 2010: 11).

## D. Conclusion

From the above discussion, there are some points that can be concluded:

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the characters struggle for their survival in a harsh and obstinate society: Mariam and Laila are wounded due to wars, relationships get tough and abusive, their property is destroyed; they are marginalized and experienced violence. Despite all this, they stick together. Mariam and Laila show relentless pursuit and resilience and face all obstacles, especially considering how women are treated in their place.

Damar Kambang is a symbol of marriage in Madura. This book tells about the tradition of marriage in Madura in which dowry is very influential. It also raises the issue of early marriage, namely a girl who is still 14 years old. The author describes how tradition makes parents view their children as objects, not as human beings.

The marginalization and violence faced by the female characters in these two novels show that women are always placed in a weak position. Women are considered as second-class citizens who have no power over themselves both economically and physically.

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