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Dasarath Neupane
PhD Scholar Dr. K.N. Modi
University, Rajasthan, India

Husband-to-wife aggression in *A thousand splendid suns* by Khaled Hosseini

Dasarath Neupane

Abstract

The theme of the study was in-depth study of husband to wife aggression from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. In this study, Rasheed's aggression was taken as the central attention, and intended to reveal aftermath of his cruel behaviour towards his wives. The study applied psychological approach to explore/explain husband to wife aggression in the novel. The researcher applied the theory of aggression in regards to the kinds of aggression that Rasheed commits on his wives. The findings of the study indicate that Rasheed is both psychologically and physically aggressive towards his wives. The recorded psychological aggressions are keeping silent towards Mariam, using harsh tone to Mariam, faulting Mariam's cooking, hurting Mariam to marry Laila, undervaluing Mariam in front of Laila, unjust faulting towards Mariam when Laila gets problems, etc. Rasheed's physical aggressions are i) physically insulting Mariam after repeatedly faulting her cooking, ii) severely punishing both Mariam and Laila over leaving the house, and iii) being more abusive towards his wives Laila and Mariam as well as daughter Aziza.

Keywords: Aggression, physical, psychological

1. Introduction

This present study aimed to study of human's aberrant behaviour from a case of husband to wife aggression in Khalid Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Three main characters Rasheed (husband), Mariam and Laila (wives of Rasheed) were studied in the novel to study aggression. Rasheed, the doer is described as a husband who continually insults his wives. He insults his wives verbally as well as physically. Thus, this study was based on explorative approach with research question: "How are Rasheed's aggressive behaviours over his wives described in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*"? In other words, the objective of this study was to explain/explore how Rasheed's aggressive behaviour is described.

Bandura (4) states that aggression is an intended behaviour that marks in personal hurts and obliteration of property of the victim. The hurts may be psychological or physical. It means in the form of devaluation or degradation of someone's emotional condition, or marked by deformed body parts of the victim of aggression. Further, he posits that variations in defining aggression pervade because some authors describe aggression solely in terms of attributes of the behaviour. This harm can take many forms such as "physical injury, hurt feelings, or damaged social relationships (to name just a few)" (Allen and Anderson 3). Although definitions vary slightly, many prominent aggression researchers have utilized highly similar definitions. For example, in order to better distinguish between certain subtypes of aggression, Anderson and Bushman (28) more specifically defined human aggression as "any behaviour directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm. In addition, the perpetrator must believe that the behaviour will harm the target and that the target is motivated to avoid the behaviour" (Allen and Anderson 3). However, others include assumptions about the instigator, emotional concomitants, or the intent of potentially hurt actions. Freedman and his colleagues (103) have similar judgement about aggression that aggression is such behaviour that is intended to injure others psychologically or physically. Likewise, Berkowitz (337) also puts similar opinion about aggression that it is intentional injury of other. Similarly, Bjorkqvist (180) stated that there are two kinds of aggression to explain about behaviour of aggression: instrumental aggression and hostile aggression. Instrumental aggression is a way to get a target, which is done by individual.

Correspondence
Dasarath Neupane
PhD Scholar, Dr. K.N. Modi
University, Rajasthan, India

While dealing about the causes of human aggression, in a longitudinal study, Farrington (460) identified the following key social predictors of violent and aggressive behaviour: poverty, family history of criminality, precarious upbringing, failing at school, attention deficit, and hyperactivity and antisocial behaviour during childhood. Scott et al. (2) studied the main determining socio-environmental factors leading to aggressive behaviour.

2. Methodology

Subject matter, approach of the study and method of the study were three main parts of methodology in this present study. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini is a novel. It is taken as subject matter of the present study. Two main characters of the novel Mariam and Laila who experience turmoil in their journey of life. Their husband Rasheed is merciless character as presented in this novel. His aggressive behaviour is ever seen upon Mariam and Laila either psychologically or physically. Finally, Rasheed's unbearable anger has headed him to his death at Mariam's hand.

The explanation of man's aggression in relation to his psyche condition especially Rasheed's mental condition to express aggression against his wives is the focus of the study. Thus, approach of the study was chosen psychology. Psychology is expected to give hidden answers behind someone's doing aggression.

While talking about the method of the study, this study adopted qualitative research method. The study of literature is a qualitative research.

3. Discussion and Analysis

3.1 Rasheed's Aggressive Behaviours over His Wives

Rasheed's Aggressive behaviours can be traced through chapter to chapter within the plots storied. It starts describing his aggressive behaviours towards Marian soon after she has miscarried. The problem formulated refers to the explanation of kinds of aggression that the aggressor possibly acts upon the sufferer. Based on the explanation provided by Bandura, two forms of aggression probably direct towards the victims by the offender. The two types of aggression are psychological and physical. Thus, here, with the line of those two categorizations, the analysis or Rasheed's aggressive behaviours will be divided as Rasheed's psychological aggression and Rasheed's physical aggression. The former is going to exhibit Rasheed's aggressive behaviours that leaves devaluing effects on Mariam's and Laila's mental conditions. Meanwhile, the latter is going to show up the physical footprints of Rasheed's aggressive acts on both Marian and Laila.

3.2 Psychological Aggression

Regarding to the review of aggression from Bandura's explanation the unwelcome effects that the victim possibly suffers from aggression are sadness, fear, anxiety, bad confidence, low self-esteem even the victims can also turn out to be abusive and aggressive (17). The exemplifications of the facts that support the label that Rasheed is psychologically aggressive towards his wives.

3.2.1 Keeping Silent toward Mariam

The first kind of aggression that Rasheed confers upon Mariam is psychological aggression by the form of not responding to Mariam. "Most nights when he came home he

hardly talked anymore (Hosseini 93)". "... he walked quickly and always a few steps ahead of her, without speaking, unmindful of Mariam who almost had to run to keep up with him (93)". While being almost never talking to Mariam Rasheed seems irritated by Mariam's question as in this following finding.

"Then stop pestering me!"

I'm sorry. *Bebakhsh*, Rasheed. I'm sorry."

He crushed out his cigarette and lit another. He turned up the volume on the radio. (94)

The winter narration shows how it is difficult for Mariam to cope with her husband's attitude. "It wasn't easy tolerating him talking this way to her ... his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat (97) ".

The subsequent act shows how Rasheed gives no attention to Mariam where he does not answer Mariam's inquiry on the government's condition. "What is going to happen? (99)" instead, "Rasheed shot her a sidelong glance. He made a sound between a sigh and a groan, dropped his legs from the table, and turned off the radio. He took it upstairs to his room. He closed the door" (99). Rasheed's being silent obviously marks the onset of his aggression over Mariam which is later on followed by more severe and increasingly frequent aggressions.

3.2.2 Using Harsh Tone to Mariam's Question and Mocking Replies

When Mariam asks for Rasheed's permission over the proper burial to forget the miscarried baby, Rasheed reacts with offensive words "What for? It's idiotic (94)". Then continuous use of sharp words "Then you do it", "I'm already buried one son. I won't bury another. Now, if you don't mind, I'm trying to listen (94)". After that he turns up again the volume of the radio while keening his head back and closing his eyes. Rasheed also answers rudely to Mariam's information about Afghanistan's political condition.

"What is a communist?" She asked.

Rasheed snorted, and raised both eyebrows. "You don't know what a communist is? Such a simple thing. Everyone knows. It's common knowledge. You don't...Bah. I don't know why I'm surprised." Then he crossed his ankle on the table and mumbled that it was someone who believe in Karl Marxist?"(97).

When he comes another question that seems enough to add more irritation "Rasheed sighed"(97). Since he feels the question is more disturbing than before, these words eventually comes from Rasheed's mouth "You know nothing, do you? You're like a child. Your brain is empty. There is no information in it"(97). From the findings, it is learned that Rasheed's level of aggression is increasing from just being silent into responding with hateful manner.

3.2.3 Showing Fault in Mariam's cooking

Rasheed's aggressive behaviours over Mariam are also felt in his way undervaluing her work especially passing intimidating judgment of her cooking. The following fact is taken from the narration:

Mariam remembered a time when she had enjoyed, even looked forward to cooking for Rasheed. Now cooking was an exercise in heightened anxiety. The *qurmas* were always too salty or too bland for his taste. The rice was judge either too greasy or too dry, the bread declared too doughy or too

crispy. Rasheed's faultfinding left her stricken in the kitchen with self-doubt. (99)

Rasheed really turns down Mariam's confidence in preparing food for him. It is also sad. for a wife when a husband always finds a problem with the food she prepared for her husband The wife likely huts upon her husband humiliating remark and another possibility is she responds her husband I attacking manner-to aggress him back. Since Mariam considers that she is the one who makes Rasheed change due to his disappointment of her recurring miscarriages she opts to give in to Rasheed's aggression.

3.2.4 Hurting Mariam when He Reveals His Intention to Marry Laila

Considering Laila's early age which is too far from rational-to Mariam's view-to marry too old Rasheed who is at that moment according to the novel is over sixty-year-old- "Rasheed had to be sixty or more" (207). Mariam boldly insists against Rasheed's plea to her agreement. However, Rasheed with his high tempered tone reproaches her argument "Don't be so dramatic. It's common thing and you know it. I have friends who have two, three, four wives. Your father had three. Besides, what I'm doing now most men I know have done it along ago. You know it's true" (209).

3.2.5 Undervaluing Mariam with Unfavourable Comparison to Laila

Rasheed says "We are city people, you and I, but she is a *dehati*. A village girl. Not even a village girl. No. she grows up in *kolba* made of mud outside the village". Then he goes on to name Mariam "*a harami*" (216), which reminds her of her disdainful memories back to the date when she shares life with her only mother. Not yet enough with that, Rasheed titles Mariam a *Volga* which is a kind of old-fashioned car. "She is sturdy, for one thing, a good worker, and without pretensions. I will say this way: if she were a car, she would be a *Volga*" (216).

Still Rasheed once again consciously or unconsciously deteriorates Mariam's self-estimation upon Laila by overvaluing Laila with the calls of queen, and *malika*. "As for you, you are the queen, the malika, and this house is your palace. Anything you need done you ask Mariam and she will do it for you. Won't you Mariam." (217). Those sorts of comparisons have been delivered to Mariam and by our own conscience; we are able to feel how unfortunate the sorrow Mariam should bear.

3.2.6 Unfair Faulting towards Mariam when Laila Gets Problems

It happens when Laila is sobbing after she falls into contemplation that Mariam and Laila's baby are the only righteous ones in their house. Laila feels guilty of her reflection that she burst into tear but Rasheed misinterprets her weeping – though also without an effort to learn the real matter-result from quarrel between her and Mariam. He abruptly convicts Mariam as the reasons of that scene "Wallah o bilah, I'll go down and teach her a lesson. Who does she think she is, that *harami* treating you (225)". Rasheed is about to dash toward Mariam but fortunately, Laila can stop him.

Then when it comes to quarrel between Laila and Rasheed, Mariam again comes as the victim of accusation and blame of what the unsatisfying conduct Laila performs to Rasheed.

He once unfairly punishes Mariam as he believes she teaches Laila to be rebellious.

"It's your doing. I know it is. (234)" He snarled, advancing on her. Mariam slid out of her bed and began backpedalling. Her arms instinctively crossed one her chest, where he often struck her first. "Her denying me". You're teaching her to. ...I should have known that you'd corrupt her, "Rasheed spat at Mariam. He swung the belt, testing it against his own thigh ... (234-235).

Thought, once again Laila can manage to interrupt in Rasheed trial to beating Mariam. This threat repeatedly psychologically shapes Mariam into condition when she has to bow to Rasheed in fear and helplessness. These continual conditions from the first encounter of psychological aggression could have developed to kind of serious anxiety, which is too much to take.

3.2.7 Turning Away His Attention from the Three (Mariam, Laila, and Aziza)

After the foiled attempt of fleeing to Peshawar two and a half year ago both Mariam and Laila usually undertake Rasheed's disregard, meaning to say Rasheed has ignored their presence. The facts gathered are as on following excerpt.

Mariam knew that she and Laila had become one and the same being to him, equally wretched, equally deserving of his distrust, his disdain and disregard. When he spoke, Mariam had the sense that he was having a conversation with himself, or with some invisible presence in the room, who, unlike her and Laila, was worthy of his opinion. (267) Ever since that incident Rasheed prefers more listening to the Voice of Shari' an aired by Taliban than taking his wives into his attention. In addition, his favour to Taliban sparks debates with Laila who can't help arguing him in his support to Taliban's brutal punishment.

After the presence of Zalmay - a boy madly longed by Rasheed- Rasheed's attention is more extricated from the rest family members. Rasheed overindulges his boy that later lead to his son deviances from his mother. Rasheed really loves his boy and has ever once rebuked harshly at Aziza on her act of turning on Zalmay's TV's power button. "Rasheed scowled snatched her wrist and set it in the table, not gently at all (290)".

3.3 Physical Aggression

The second kind of aggression to follow Bandura's explanations is physical aggression. The aggression causes the victims suffer physical defects i.e. body's injury, body's defect, and body's disability. This aggression possibly is in all form of physical attacks like battering, leashing, leashing, force the victims to hear their self, and still not to mention killing. The facts of Rasheed's physical aggression over his wives are discussed in the following subsections.

3.3.1 Physically Insulting Mariam after Repeatedly Faulting Her Cooking

By the onset of his displeasure and disappointment over the foods prepared by Mariam, Rasheed then makes this as the excuse to insult her physically which marks the first physical deformity that she suffers to crush down some of her teeth. "Rasheed made a ball of rice with his fingers. He put it in his mouth, chewed once, then twice, before grimacing and spitting it out the *sofrah*..... Then the hard

the front door opening and Rasheed was back in the living room" (102).

"Get up" he said. "Come here. Get up."

He snatched her hand, opened it, and dropped a handful of pebbles into it. "Put these in your mouth."

..... "CHEW!" he bellowed.....

..... Then was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood, and the the fragments of two broken molars. (102-103)

3.3.2 Severely Punishing both Mariam and Laila over Leaving the Home

Through Mariam and Laila have carefully plotted a plan before they bring Aziza out of the house, it still leaves high level of anxiety. Those are the fear of beining noticed by Rasheed that they are fleeing away and the fear of being busted by Sharia police. Then indeed, the fact is that finally officer thanks to a man who has affected helping their getaway handles them. Eventually, Mariam and Laila are sent home and handed to Rasheed to make them pay their ill-fated effort. Rasheed high level physical aggression is all the cost.

Laila did not see the punch coming. One moment she was talking and the net she was on all fours, wide-eyed and red-faced, trying to draw a breath. It was as if a car had hit her at full speed, in the tender place between the lower tipoff breastbone and the belly button. She realized she had dropped Aziza that Aziza was screaming. She tried to breathe again and could only make a husky, choking sound. Dribble hung from her mouth. (261)

It is still continuing that Rasheed seems to accumulate all his efforts to make the torture on Mariam worse. "Briefly after repeating sound of battering with no screaming even pleading from Mariam, Laila witnesses Rasheed dragging Mariam into the tool shed. "Mariam was barefoot and doubled over. There was blood on his hands, blood on Marias's face, her, down her neck and back. Her shirt had been ripped down the front" (262).

"Rasheed then locks Mariam in the tool shed while Laila and Aziza in a light-closed room and deprives them from food and water for four days"(263).

Finishing those all dying punishment he warps it by uttering word of threat that if she does it again he will surely punish her again starting from Mariam, then Aziza and finally Lila herself. "I will make you watch" (Hosseini, 265). "And, with that, he left the room. But before delivering a kick to the flank that would have Laila pissing blood for days. (265)

3.3.3 Getting further Abusive towards Laila, Mariam and Aziza

In opposition to Zalmay, Aziza turns in her own fate as unlucky since Rasheed insists to have Laila sent her to be a beggar in one mosque – that later will be an orphanage instead. Since Laila refuses to agree, Rasheed then without much doubt unleashes his anger in the form of physical force.

Laila did not notice that Rasheed was back in the room. Until his hand was around her throat until she was lifted off her feet and slammed against the wall. Up close, this sneering face seemed impossibly large. Laila noticed how much puffier it was getting with age, nose. Rasheed didn't say anything. Add, really, what could be said, want needed saying, when you'd shoved the barrel of your gun into your wife,s mouth? (293)

Rasheed's economic condition is worsening contributed by his burning shoes shop, and also betting fired from some jobs like kebab restaurant and others. These situations also come as one of supplies of Rasheed abusive behaviour that is increasing in quantity. "After fired, Rasheed was home almost every day. He slapped Aziza. He kicked Mariam. He threw things. He found fault with Laila, the way she smelled, the way she dressed the way she combed her hair, her yellowing teeth". (Hosseini, 297) Another instance of his aggression is. "And then he was on Laila, pummeling her chest. Her head. Her belly with fist, tearing at her hair, throwing her to the wall...He went on kicking,, kicking Mariam now spittle flying from his mouth his eyes glittering with murderous intent kicking until he could 't anymore" (298).

Learning that Laila has met with Tariq at his back from Zalmay, Rasheed is very angry. Rasheed responds it with "Well, what do you know? Laila and Majnoo reunited. Just like old time" (328).

Then Rasheed gradually asks his boy the more detailed explanation. Soon after she considers it has been clear enough he releases his anger in merciless attack toward Laila after escorting his boy to go upstairs locking all doors and unbuckle his belt to put it on his knuckles. (Hosseini, 337)

Without saying a word, he swung the belt at Laila. He did it with such speed that she had no time to retreat or duck, or even raise a protective arm. Laila touched her fingers to her temple looked at the blood looked at Rasheed with astonishment....Rasheed swung the belt again ...He caught her, threw her up against the wall and struck her with the belt again the buckle slamming against her chest, her shoulder, her raised arms, her fingers, drawing blood wherever it stuck. (337-338)

Then the peak of all of this is the finishing from Mariam that she shoves on Rasheed by the shovel she has taken before from the tool shed. Mariam's monumental decision id drifted by the dread that Rasheed will dash to his gun to end all of this fighting. "If she let him walk now, how long before he fetched the key from his pocket and went for that gun of his upstairs in the room where he'd locked Zalmay ... But in Rasheed's eyes she saw murder for them both". (340)

4. Conclusion

Rasheed's aggression against his wives both psychologically and physically can be seen by his behaviours. The recorded psychological aggressions are keeping silent towards Mariam, using harsh tone to Mariam, faulting Mariam's cooking, hurting Mariam to marry Laila, undervaluing Mariam in front of Laila, unjust faulting towards Mariam when Laila gets problems, etc. Rasheed's physical aggressions are i) physically insulting Mariam after repeatedly faulting her cooking, ii) severely punishing both Mariam and Laila over leaving the house, and iii) being more abusive towards his wives Laila and Mariam as well as daughter Aziza. The outline of Rasheed's aggression over his wives was reviewed from chapter to chapter in parallel with the development of the plot storied. From that in-depth study, it was noted that aggression of Rasheed tends to grow bigger and bigger in terms of intensity and quality that usually evolves from psychological to physical aggression.

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