

Signifying Resistance: A Semiotic Analysis of Patriarchal Culture and Female Agency in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

A. Niftah, Abd Halim*, Muhammad Hasbi

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Literature,
Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia
e-mail: andinifta1@gmail.com, abd.halim@unm.ac.id, emhasby@unm.ac.id

*Corresponding Author.

Abstract: Patriarchal culture remains a persistent social issue and is frequently represented in literary works as a system that shapes women's identities, experiences, and social positions. This study aims to examine how patriarchal culture is represented in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Employing a qualitative textual analysis design, the study uses the novel as its primary data source. The data consist of dialogues, narrative descriptions, and character interactions depicting patriarchal practices, which were collected through close reading, systematic note-taking, and textual categorization. Data were analyzed at three levels of signification denotation, connotation, and myth to uncover both explicit and ideological meanings embedded in the text. The findings reveal that patriarchal culture is constructed through four interconnected domains: household, sexuality, violence, and cultural institutions. At the denotative level, these domains depict women's exclusion from decision-making, control over female sexuality, domestic abuse, and educational restrictions. At the connotative level, they signify unequal gender relations that privilege male authority and female subordination. At the mythical level, the novel naturalizes cultural beliefs that legitimize male dominance, female obedience, son preference, and the normalization of women's suffering. The study concludes that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* represents patriarchy as a socially and ideologically constructed system sustained through interconnected cultural myths. By applying Barthes' semiotic framework, the study demonstrates how the novel simultaneously exposes and critiques the ideological mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality.

Keywords: patriarchy, semiotics, roland barthes, gender inequality, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

How to Cite: Niftah, A., Halim, A., & Hasbi, M. (2026). Signifying Resistance: A Semiotic Analysis of Patriarchal Culture and Female Agency in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. *Interling: International Journal of English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics*, 4 (1), 10-20. <https://doi.org/10.55210/interling.v4i1.2539>

Introduction

Literature has long been recognized as a cultural arena in which social realities, ideological tensions, and power relations are represented, negotiated, and contested. Rather than merely reflecting society, literary texts actively construct meanings that shape public understandings of identity, authority, and social order (Altun, 2023; Lewis, 2001). Through narrative representation, literature not only depicts systems of inequality but also reveals the cultural processes through which these systems are legitimized, maintained, or challenged. Among these systems, patriarchy remains one of the most pervasive forms of social domination, influencing women's roles, rights, and opportunities across different cultural contexts. Despite the extensive representation of patriarchy in literary works, many studies continue to emphasize its social consequences while paying comparatively little attention to the semiotic processes through which patriarchal ideology is encoded and normalized in literary narratives. Consequently, there remains a need to investigate how literary signs construct and

naturalize patriarchal meanings, making semiotic analysis essential for uncovering the ideological mechanisms embedded within literary texts.

One of the most enduring forms of social inequality represented in literature is patriarchy. Patriarchy refers to a system of social relations in which men exercise disproportionate power and authority over women through cultural, political, economic, and familial institutions (Farias et al., 2023; Poyares, 2023). Although the manifestations of patriarchy differ across societies, its underlying logic remains the same: the normalization of male dominance and female subordination. Contemporary gender scholars argue that patriarchal power is maintained not only through direct control but also through symbolic and discursive practices that make gender inequality appear natural and legitimate (Butler, 2005; Tamez, 2025). As a result, cultural representations play a crucial role in sustaining or challenging patriarchal ideology.

Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) presents a compelling portrayal of patriarchal culture through the lives of Mariam and Laila, whose experiences reflect multiple forms of gender-based oppression in Afghan society. Throughout the narrative, issues such as unequal family power relations, forced marriage, polygamy, gender-based violence, restrictions on women's education, and expectations surrounding reproduction illustrate the complex ways in which patriarchal values shape women's everyday lives. According to Sultana (2010), patriarchy operates through interconnected social structures that collectively reinforce women's subordination, while Becker (1999) argues that patriarchal systems regulate women's autonomy through institutions such as marriage and reproduction. Likewise, Shameem (2014) contends that women are frequently positioned as objects of male control, particularly in matters concerning sexuality and family life. These perspectives suggest that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* provides a rich literary context for examining how patriarchal ideology is represented through characters, dialogues, and narrative events. However, the ideological meanings embedded within these representations have yet to be systematically examined through a semiotic perspective, leaving unanswered questions about how patriarchal values are constructed, legitimized, and naturalized within the novel.

Violence functions as a mechanism for sustaining patriarchal authority through physical and psychological abuse. Sultana (2010) contends that patriarchal power relations normalize violence against women by positioning men as dominant and women as subordinate. The experiences of Mariam and Laila demonstrate how violence is used to enforce obedience and suppress resistance. Meanwhile, patriarchy in cultural institutions is reinforced through religion, education, law, and social traditions that legitimize gender inequality and restrict women's participation in public life. Brännmark (2021) and Kuhn (2013) note that patriarchal values are continuously reproduced through social institutions that privilege male authority and confine women to limited social roles. Collectively, these four dimensions reveal that patriarchy in the novel operates as a comprehensive system of power that shapes women's identities, opportunities, and freedoms while simultaneously generating the conditions that motivate resistance.

The experiences of women living under patriarchal structures have become a significant theme in contemporary literature, particularly in narratives emerging from conflict-affected societies. Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* presents a compelling portrayal of women's lives in Afghanistan during periods of political upheaval, war, and Taliban rule. Through the intertwined stories of Mariam and Laila, the novel depicts multiple forms of gender oppression, including forced marriage, domestic violence, educational exclusion, and restrictions on women's autonomy. Yet the novel extends beyond victimization narratives by portraying women as active agents capable of resisting and negotiating oppressive conditions. Through solidarity, sacrifice, and emotional resilience, Mariam and Laila gradually challenge the patriarchal structures that seek to define and constrain their lives.

The representation of patriarchy and resistance in literary texts is communicated through systems of signs that operate beyond the level of literal meaning. Character actions, dialogues, symbolic objects, and narrative events function as cultural signs that communicate ideological assumptions about gender and power. Understanding these representations therefore requires an analytical framework capable of uncovering both explicit and implicit meanings embedded within the text. Semiotics provides such a framework by examining how signs generate meaning and how ideology becomes naturalized through representation (Connell, 2009). Among semiotic approaches, Roland Barthes' theory remains particularly influential because it conceptualizes meaning through three interconnected levels: denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). Through these levels, semiotic analysis reveals how cultural narratives transform historically constructed ideas into seemingly natural truths.

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized that resistance should not be understood solely as overt rebellion. Resistance may also emerge through symbolic practices, acts of solidarity, emotional resilience, and alternative meaning-making processes that challenge dominant power structures (Pérezts & Mandalaki, 2024; Travers, 2023). In literary narratives, women's resistance is often encoded through signs and symbols that communicate agency, dignity, and opposition to patriarchal authority. Semiotic analysis therefore offers a valuable lens for understanding how resistance is constructed and how literary texts participate in broader ideological debates concerning gender and power.

Previous studies on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have predominantly examined the novel through feminist, sociological, and gender-oriented perspectives. Existing scholarship has explored themes such as women's rights and gender discrimination (Shihada, 2019), unconventional gender relationships and female oppression (Ahmed, 2022), discourse and gender relations (Chaudhary, 2020), women's resistance to patriarchal domination (Aiman et al., 2022), and the representation of women as symbols of resilience and empowerment within patriarchal societies (Imran & Ismail, 2022). Collectively, these studies have demonstrated that Hosseini's novel provides a powerful critique of gender inequality and highlights the social consequences of patriarchal structures. However, their analyses have largely concentrated on thematic interpretation, feminist criticism, or sociocultural representation, giving comparatively limited attention to the semiotic mechanisms through which patriarchal ideology is constructed and legitimized within the narrative. In particular, little research has examined how dialogues, narrative events, symbolic objects, and character interactions function as systems of signs that generate denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. Moreover, previous studies have generally treated patriarchy as a social phenomenon represented in the text rather than investigating how literary signs naturalize patriarchal beliefs and simultaneously encode forms of female agency and resistance. Consequently, the ideological processes through which patriarchal meanings are produced, sustained, and challenged remain insufficiently explored. To address this gap, the present study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to examine how patriarchal culture is represented through multiple levels of signification, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the ideological construction of patriarchy and the symbolic articulation of female agency in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

To address this gap, the present study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to analyze the representation of patriarchal culture and female agency in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Specifically, the study aims to identify the forms of patriarchal culture experienced by Mariam and Laila, examine how patriarchal ideology is encoded through literary signs, and interpret how female agency is constructed across the denotative, connotative, and mythical levels of signification. The novelty of this study lies in its systematic application of Barthes' three-level semiotic model to demonstrate how patriarchal ideology is not merely represented but also naturalized through interconnected systems of signs, while simultaneously revealing the symbolic construction of female

agency and resistance. Unlike previous studies that primarily interpret the novel from feminist or sociological perspectives, this study explains the ideological mechanisms through which patriarchal meanings are produced, legitimized, and challenged within the narrative. By integrating literary semiotics with gender analysis, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how literary texts construct, sustain, and contest patriarchal ideology (Chapman & Clark, 2014; Johansen, 2002).

Method

This study is a qualitative literary research employing textual analysis to examine the representation of patriarchal culture and female agency in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). Qualitative textual analysis was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting meanings embedded in literary signs, symbols, dialogues, and narrative events rather than measuring variables quantitatively. As McKee (McKee, 2001, 2005) argues, textual analysis enables researchers to explore how meanings are constructed, negotiated, and communicated within cultural texts.

The primary data source was Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (1st Riverhead Books edition, 2007), from which words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narrative descriptions, and symbolic events related to patriarchal practices and female agency were selected for analysis, with particular attention given to textual segments involving the two main female characters, Mariam and Laila. Data were collected through close reading and systematic note-taking. The novel was read repeatedly to identify textual units representing patriarchal culture, including domestic domination, control of female sexuality, institutional restrictions, and gender-based violence. Simultaneously, textual evidence depicting women's resistance, agency, and solidarity was recorded and categorized. Relevant excerpts were then organized according to the study's research objectives.

Data analysis was guided by Roland Barthes' (1972) semiotic framework, which examines meaning at three interconnected levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the analysis focused on the literal meaning of textual signs and narrative events. At the connotative level, the study explored the cultural and ideological associations attached to those signs. Finally, at the mythical level, the analysis investigated how patriarchal values were naturalized, legitimized, or challenged within the narrative. Through this three-level analytical process, the study identified how patriarchal ideology operates in the novel and how female resistance is symbolically constructed.

Trustworthiness was established through investigator triangulation, iterative close reading, and theoretical triangulation by interpreting the textual data in relation to Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and relevant scholarship on patriarchy and gender representation. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the analysis by ensuring that the interpretations remained consistent, theoretically grounded, and supported by textual evidence.

Results and Discussion

Findings

This study investigates the representation of patriarchal culture in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The analysis reveals that patriarchy in the novel is manifested through four interconnected domains: household, sexuality, violence, and cultural institutions. These dimensions are represented through dialogues, narrative events, and character interactions that construct ideological meanings beyond their literal functions. Through denotative, connotative, and mythical levels of signification, the novel exposes how patriarchal values are normalized and perpetuated within Afghan society. The following sections present the semiotic analysis of each dimension of patriarchy identified in the novel.

Table 1. Semiotic Representation of Patriarchy in Household

Dialogue/Scene	Textual Evidence	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Mariam is informed that her marriage has already been arranged.	<i>"Actually, your father has already given Rasheed his answer," Afsoon said. "Rasheed is here, in Herat; he has come all the way from Kabul. The nikka will be tomorrow morning, and then there is a bus leaving for Kabul at noon."</i> (p. 49)	Afsoon informs Mariam that Jalil has agreed to her marriage with Rasheed.	Mariam's opinion is excluded from a life-changing decision.	A father has full authority to decide on his daughter's marriage.
Rasheed justifies marrying Laila as beneficial for everyone.	<i>"I'm giving you help around the house and her a sanctuary. A home and a husband..."</i> (p. 209)	Rasheed claims that marrying Laila will benefit both women.	Male dominance is disguised as kindness and responsibility.	Domestic work is a wife's duty.
Mariam warns Laila about Rasheed's preference for sons.	<i>"He'll turn on you too, you know... And you gave him a daughter. So, you see, your sin is even less forgivable than mine."</i> (p. 243–245)	Mariam explains Rasheed's disappointment over having a daughter.	Women are blamed for failing to satisfy male expectations.	Giving birth to a son is more valuable than giving birth to a daughter.

Table 1 reveals a consistent pattern in which household patriarchy is constructed through the systematic exclusion of women's decision-making power and the normalization of male authority across different familial roles. Although the three excerpts portray different domestic situations arranged marriage, polygamy, and son preference they collectively represent a recurring ideological structure in which men exercise authority while women are positioned as compliant recipients of male decisions.

At the denotative level, patriarchal control appears as ordinary family interactions and marital arrangements. At the connotative level, these interactions signify unequal power relations by portraying male dominance as responsibility, protection, and legitimate leadership, while women's value is measured by their domestic labor and reproductive performance. At the mythical level, the repeated representation of paternal authority, marital obedience, and son preference naturalizes the belief that male control over women's lives is both socially desirable and culturally legitimate. The recurrence of these patterns demonstrates that patriarchy in the household operates not as isolated acts of domination but as an institutionalized ideological system embedded within everyday family life.

Table 2. Semiotic Representation of Patriarchy in Sexuality

Dialogue/Scene	Textual Evidence	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Hasina describes the future expected of young girls.	<i>"By the time we're twenty, Hasina used to say, Giti and I, we'll have pushed out four, five kids each."</i> (p. 74)	Hasina imagines having several children before the age of twenty.	Women's futures are defined through reproduction and motherhood.	A woman's primary purpose is to become a wife and mother.
Rasheed expresses confidence that Mariam will bear a son.	<i>"I think it's a boy. Yes. A boy."</i> (p. 85)	Rasheed believes Mariam is carrying a boy.	Male children are valued more highly than female children.	Boys bring greater honor and status to the family.
Rasheed legitimizes his polygamous marriage.	<i>"I'm giving you help around the house and her a sanctuary. A home and a husband..."</i> (p. 209)	Rasheed explains his decision to marry Laila.	Polygamy is framed as a charitable and rational act.	Men possess greater marital and sexual rights than women.

Table 2 reveals a recurring pattern in which women's sexuality is systematically constructed as an object of patriarchal regulation through marriage, reproduction, and gender preference. Across the three excerpts, female identity is consistently defined in relation to men's expectations rather than women's autonomy. At the denotative level, the narrative presents discussions of marriage, pregnancy, and family formation as ordinary aspects of domestic life. At the connotative level, however, these representations signify unequal gender relations by positioning women's bodies as instruments for fulfilling reproductive obligations, preserving family lineage, and satisfying male interests.

The repeated emphasis on early motherhood, son preference, and the justification of polygamy demonstrates that women's social value is determined by their reproductive capacity and conformity to patriarchal expectations. At the mythical level, these recurring signs naturalize the cultural belief that women's primary purpose is to become wives and mothers, while simultaneously legitimizing men's greater authority over marriage, reproduction, and sexual relationships. Collectively, these patterns illustrate that patriarchal control over female sexuality operates not through isolated practices but through an interconnected ideological system that normalizes gender inequality as a culturally accepted social order.

Table 3. Semiotic Representation of Patriarchy in Violence

Dialogue/Scene	Textual Evidence	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Rasheed punishes Mariam for her cooking.	<i>"His powerful hands clasped her jaw... 'Now chew,' he said... 'Now you know what your rice tastes like.'"</i> (pp. 102–103)	Rasheed forces Mariam to chew pebbles.	Violence is used to humiliate and control women.	A wife's primary duty is to serve her husband perfectly.
Rasheed prepares to beat Mariam with a belt.	<i>"I should have known that you'd corrupt her."</i> (p. 146)	Rasheed threatens Mariam with physical punishment.	Fear becomes a tool for enforcing obedience.	Husbands have the right to discipline their wives.
Laila pleads with Rasheed to stop the beating.	<i>"Please, Rasheed, no beating!"</i> (p. 146)	Laila attempts to protect Mariam.	Violence is normalized within patriarchal relationships.	Women are expected to endure male aggression.

Table 3 reveals a consistent pattern in which violence functions as an institutionalized mechanism for sustaining patriarchal authority through physical coercion, psychological intimidation, and emotional subjugation. Although the excerpts depict different forms of abuse, they collectively demonstrate that violence is not represented as an isolated expression of personal anger but as a socially legitimized practice for enforcing female obedience and reinforcing male dominance. At the denotative level, the narrative portrays acts of punishment, threats, and pleas for mercy within the domestic sphere. At the connotative level, these actions signify unequal power relations in which fear, humiliation, and intimidation become effective instruments for controlling women's behavior and suppressing resistance.

The repeated portrayal of Mariam's punishment and Laila's intervention further illustrates that violence extends beyond physical harm to establish a climate of fear that regulates women's actions and limits their autonomy. At the mythical level, these recurring representations naturalize the belief that husbands possess the legitimate authority to discipline their wives and that women are expected to endure abuse as an inevitable aspect of marriage. Collectively, the data indicate that violence operates as an ideological instrument through which patriarchal power is normalized, reproduced, and sustained within the household.

Table 4. Semiotic Representation of Patriarchy in Cultural Institutions

Dialogue/Scene	Textual Evidence	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Mariam wishes to attend school.	<i>"What's the sense schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon."</i> (p. 14)	Nana rejects Mariam's desire to attend school.	Education is considered unnecessary for girls.	Women do not need education because they belong in the domestic sphere.
Nana teaches Mariam how women should live.	<i>"There is only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life... tahamul. Endure."</i> (p. 14)	Nana advises Mariam to endure hardship.	Women are expected to tolerate suffering rather than challenge it.	Female suffering is natural and inevitable.
Nana describes women's position in society.	<i>"Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always."</i> (p. 7)	Nana explains that women are always blamed.	Society routinely shifts responsibility onto women.	Women are naturally responsible for social and moral failures.

Table 4 reveals a recurring pattern in which cultural institutions function as ideological mechanisms that legitimize and perpetuate patriarchal values through education, socialization, and cultural beliefs. Across the three excerpts, patriarchal ideology is transmitted not only through male authority but also through internalized cultural norms that shape women's perceptions of themselves and their social roles. At the denotative level, the narrative depicts girls being denied educational opportunities, encouraged to endure hardship, and routinely blamed for social problems. At the connotative level, these representations signify the institutional regulation of women's identities by defining obedience, sacrifice, and silence as desirable feminine virtues.

The recurrence of these signs demonstrates that patriarchal domination is sustained not merely through coercion but also through the socialization of women into accepting inequality as an unquestioned reality. At the mythical level, the novel naturalizes the belief that women's exclusion from education, acceptance of suffering, and responsibility for familial and social failures constitute inherent aspects of womanhood rather than socially constructed forms of oppression. Collectively, these patterns illustrate that cultural institutions play a pivotal role in reproducing patriarchal ideology across generations by transforming historically contingent gender norms into culturally accepted truths.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that patriarchal culture in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* operates through interconnected structures of household authority, sexuality, violence, and cultural institutions. Through Barthes' (1972) semiotic framework, these forms of patriarchy are revealed not merely as individual acts of oppression but as ideological systems that become normalized through cultural beliefs and social practices. At the denotative level, the novel portrays women's experiences of forced marriage, domestic subordination, gender discrimination, and abuse. For example, Jalil's unilateral decision to arrange Mariam's marriage without her consent (see Table 1) explicitly illustrates the exclusion of women from life-changing decisions, while Rasheed's insistence that Mariam is carrying a son (see Table 2) reflects the privileged status of male offspring within patriarchal culture. At the connotative and mythical levels, these events extend beyond individual experiences to signify broader cultural assumptions that position men as legitimate decision-makers and define women's value primarily through obedience and reproductive capacity. These examples support Barthes' argument that myths transform historically constructed gender ideologies into seemingly natural and unquestionable truths, thereby legitimizing patriarchal authority as an accepted social order rather than a socially constructed system of domination.

The household emerges as one of the primary sites through which patriarchal power is exercised. At the denotative level, the novel depicts Mariam's forced marriage and her exclusion from decisions regarding her future, particularly when Jalil accepts Rasheed's marriage proposal without consulting her. These events portray the literal exercise of paternal authority within the family. At the connotative level, however, the household signifies an unequal power structure in which women are denied autonomy while male authority is presented as a legitimate form of responsibility and protection. Mariam's silence and lack of agency reflect the cultural expectation that daughters should comply with decisions made by male family members. At the mythical level, these recurring representations naturalize the belief that fathers possess the inherent right to determine their daughters' futures and that women's obedience constitutes the proper social order within the family. This process exemplifies Barthes' (1972) notion that myths transform historically constructed gender relations into seemingly natural and unquestionable truths. These findings further align with Walby's (1990) argument that the household functions as a central patriarchal structure in which women's labor, obedience, and reproductive roles are institutionally regulated through male authority.

The findings also reveal that patriarchy extends into the realm of sexuality through the regulation of women's bodies, reproductive roles, and marital status. Women are expected to marry, bear children, and fulfill male expectations regarding family continuity. Rasheed's strong preference for a son and his disappointment toward daughters reflect a gender hierarchy that assigns greater value to male children. Such representations support Pierik's (2022) assertion that patriarchal societies historically construct women's reproductive capacities as resources to be controlled for social and familial interests. Through these narratives, the novel exposes how female sexuality becomes regulated not by women's own choices but by cultural expectations and male authority.

Another significant finding concerns the role of violence as a mechanism for sustaining patriarchal domination. Rasheed's repeated acts of physical and psychological abuse are not portrayed as isolated expressions of anger but as systematic efforts to maintain control and obedience (Tamez, 2025). The pebbles scene, in which Mariam is forced to chew stones as punishment for her cooking, illustrates this process across Barthes' three levels of signification. At the denotative level, the act depicts Rasheed humiliating Mariam by forcing her to chew pebbles as a consequence of failing to satisfy his expectations. At the connotative level, the punishment signifies that a woman's value is determined by her ability to perform domestic duties and that any perceived failure warrants correction through violence. At the mythical level, however, the scene naturalizes the patriarchal belief that husbands possess the legitimate authority to discipline their wives and that female suffering is an acceptable consequence of inadequate domestic performance. Through this transformation, violence is no longer perceived as abuse but as a culturally sanctioned means of preserving family order and male authority. This interpretation strongly supports Barthes' (1972) argument that myths convert historically constructed ideologies into commonsense beliefs, while also resonating with Hooks' (2000) assertion that violence functions as a central instrument through which patriarchal systems preserve male dominance and suppress women's resistance.

Beyond the household and interpersonal relationships, the findings show that patriarchy is reinforced through cultural institutions such as education, social traditions, and community values. Nana's rejection of formal education for girls and her insistence that women must simply "endure" suffering illustrate how patriarchal beliefs are transmitted across generations. This internalization occurs through cultural socialization, whereby patriarchal norms are repeatedly transmitted through families, communities, and social institutions until they are perceived as natural and unquestionable. From Barthes' (1972) perspective, this process reflects the operation of myth, in which historically constructed gender ideologies become normalized as common sense, leading women to accept and sometimes reproduce the very values that sustain their subordination. This supports Beauvoir's

argument in Knowles (2019) that women's subordinate status is not biologically determined but socially constructed through institutions and cultural practices that shape perceptions of gender roles.

An important contribution of this study is its demonstration that patriarchy in the novel functions simultaneously at personal, social, and ideological levels. Previous studies have primarily interpreted *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through feminist and sociological perspectives, emphasizing women's oppression, gender discrimination, and resistance to patriarchal domination. For instance, Shihada (2019) argues that the novel advocates women's rights by exposing systemic gender inequality, while Ahmed (2022) focuses on the unconventional relationships that reveal women's oppression within Afghan society. Similarly, Aiman et al. (2022) examine women's resistance as a response to patriarchal domination. Although these studies successfully explain the social and feminist dimensions of the novel, they pay limited attention to the semiotic mechanisms through which patriarchal ideology is constructed and naturalized. The present study extends this body of scholarship by employing Barthes' semiotic framework to demonstrate that patriarchal oppression is sustained not only through unequal social relations but also through systems of signification that transform historically constructed gender ideologies into culturally accepted myths. This perspective provides a deeper understanding of how literary signs simultaneously reproduce patriarchal values and expose the ideological processes through which those values are legitimized and contested.

Overall, the findings indicate that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* serves as a powerful critique of patriarchal ideology. Through the experiences of Mariam and Laila, the novel exposes how gender inequality is reproduced through family structures, reproductive expectations, violence, and cultural institutions. More importantly, by revealing the constructed nature of these patriarchal myths, the narrative challenges their legitimacy and invites readers to reconsider assumptions regarding authority, gender roles, and women's social position (Riley & Chatterjee, 2022). Consequently, the novel functions not only as a literary representation of women's suffering but also as a critique of the ideological foundations that sustain patriarchal domination. These findings contribute to literary studies by demonstrating the value of Barthes' semiotic framework for uncovering the ideological meanings embedded in narrative representations, while also enriching feminist literary criticism by illustrating how patriarchal power is constructed, normalized, and contested through systems of signification rather than merely represented as a social reality.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that patriarchal culture in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is systematically represented through four interconnected domains: household, sexuality, violence, and cultural institutions. Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the analysis confirms that these domains function simultaneously at the denotative, connotative, and mythical levels, revealing that patriarchal domination is sustained not only through social practices but also through ideological meanings that become naturalized as cultural myths. The findings confirm that forced marriage, reproductive expectations, domestic violence, and institutional restrictions collectively reinforce beliefs that legitimize male authority and normalize female subordination. The novelty of this study lies in its systematic application of Barthes' three-level model of signification to explain how patriarchal ideology is constructed, naturalized, and contested through literary signs, thereby extending previous feminist and sociological studies that have primarily emphasized the social consequences of patriarchy. Consequently, the study contributes to literary semiotics and feminist literary criticism by demonstrating how literary texts function as ideological sites that simultaneously reproduce and challenge patriarchal power.

Future studies are encouraged to examine *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through complementary theoretical perspectives, such as feminist literary criticism, critical discourse analysis, or intersectionality, to generate broader insights into gender relations and power structures. Comparative

analyses involving literary works from different cultural contexts may further illuminate how patriarchal ideologies are constructed and negotiated across societies. Additionally, the novel may serve as a valuable pedagogical resource for fostering critical discussions on gender equality, women's rights, and the role of literary narratives in challenging dominant cultural ideologies.

References

- Ahmed, A. (2022). *Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns: A Saga of Unconventional Relationships*. <https://doi.org/10.5958/2454-1753.2022.00006.X>
- Aiman, A., Ulinuha, R., & Sarwanto, S. (2022). Women's Resistance in the Novel A Thousand Splendid Suns: A Middle Eastern Study from the Islamic Feminism Perspective. *Center of Middle Eastern Studies (CMES)*, 15(2), 175–184. <https://doi.org/10.20961/cmcs.15.2.57839>
- Altun, M. (2023). Literature and identity: Examine the role of literature in shaping individual and cultural identities. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 10(3), 381–385. <https://doi.org/10.23918/ijsses.v10i3p381>
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang, 117.
- Becker, M. (1999). Patriarchy and inequality: Towards a substantive feminism. *U. Chi. Legal F.*, 21.
- Brännmark, J. (2021). Patriarchy as institutional. *Journal of Social Ontology*, 7(2), 233–254. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jso-2021-0033>
- Butler, J. (2005). Subjects of sex/gender/desire. *Feminist Theory: A Philosophical Anthology*, 145–153.
- Chapman, S., & Clark, B. (2014). Introduction: Pragmatic literary stylistics. In *Pragmatic Literary Stylistics* (pp. 1–15). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023278_1
- Chaudhary, P. (2020). Layers of Discourse and Gender Relation in Khaled Hosseini's a Thousand Splendid Suns. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2020.83147>
- Connell, R. (2009). *Gender* (Vol. 14). Polity.
- Farias, M. G., Biermann, M. C., de Melo Maia, L. F., & de Oliveira Meneses, G. (2023). Structural patriarchy and male dominance hierarchies. In *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence* (pp. 1–14). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85493-5_2152-1
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Pluto press.
- Hosseini, K. (2007). *A thousand splendid suns*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Imran, M., & Ismail, S. M. (2022). Khaled Hosseini's women as modern archetypes: A study of obedient, resistant and empowered Afghan women. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7, 1041435. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.1041435>
- Johansen, J. D. (2002). *Literary discourse: A semiotic-pragmatic approach to literature*. University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442676725>
- Knowles, C. (2019). Beauvoir on women's complicity in their own unfreedom. *Hypatia*, 34(2), 242–265. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12469>
- Kuhn, A. (2013). Structures of patriarchy and capital in the family. In *Feminism and Materialism (RLE Feminist Theory)* (pp. 42–67). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094082-9>
- Lewis, C. (2001). *Literary practices as social acts: Power, status, and cultural norms in the classroom*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410600585>
- McKee, A. (2001). A beginner's guide to textual analysis. *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, (127/128), 138–149.
- McKee, A. (2005). *The public sphere: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819339>
- Pérezts, M., & Mandalaki, E. (2024). Unsilencing silence on business school sexism: A behind-the-scenes narration on regaining voice. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 31(5), 2138–2157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12959>

- Pierik, B. (2022). Patriarchal power as a conceptual tool for gender history. *Rethinking History*, 26(1), 71–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2022.2037864>
- Poyares, M. (2023). Patriarchy. In *Gender Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Academia* (pp. 118–128). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003363590-13>
- Riley, N. E., & Chatterjee, N. (2022). *Controlling reproduction: women, society, and state power*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Shameem, B. (2014). Living on the Edge: Women in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 2(4), 62–66.
- Shihada, I. M. (2019). Revisiting Women Rights in Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. *International Journal Of English: Literature, Language & Skills*, 7(4), 25–40.
- Sultana, A. (2010). Patriarchy and women's subordination: a theoretical analysis. *Arts Faculty Journal*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3329/afj.v4i0.12929>
- Tamez, J. (2025). Patriarchy And Women's Autonomy: Examining Its Impact On Rights. *Sociological Imagination*, 60(2).
- Travere, A. (2023). The interplay of signs and visuals: Unveiling the symbiotic relationship between semiotics and visual communication. *Journal of Linguistics and Communication Studies*, 2(3), 28–40.