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**GENDER DISCOURSE OF “A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS”  
BY KHALED HOSSEINI**

**ГЕНДЕРНИЙ ДИСКУРС ХУДОЖНЬОГО РОМАНУ  
«ТИСЯЧІ ЧУДОВИХ СОНЕЧОК» ХАЛЕДА ХОССЕЙНІ**

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This piece aims to investigate some aspects of gender discourse verbalization in modern literature on the basis of the fiction novel “A Thousand Splendid Suns” by Khaled Hosseini. The piece in question aims to research two main female characters of the novel: Laila and Mariam in terms of feminism and feminist discourse actualization under religious (Muslim) norms. The history of women's struggle for their rights, despite the fact that this struggle is an integral part of human history, is almost unknown to the vast majority of citizens, both men and women. It is only in recent decades that feminism has become the subject of public debate, research, and in sometimes, even a discipline at certain universities. The struggle of women for their rights, both political and economic, cultural and, above all, social began to gain momentum with the advent of suffragism and this process is still far from being over. Recently, interest in women's history has increased significantly, as women's position in society is an acute social problem. However, despite all the achievements of feminism, men still prevail in all spheres of life, especially when it comes to countries whose citizens profess Islam and obey Sharia law. The ideology of feminism, which became widespread in the mid-twentieth century, has greatly influenced the way women think, live, and behave in society. During its development, feminism has emerged in different directions, which, in turn, have formed under the influence of society. Gender discourse analysis is one area of critical discursive research that focuses on establishing the correspondence between the gender structure of society and the gender asymmetric structures of discursive practices. Analyzing a number of scientific works (philosophical, literary, linguistic, etc.) The authors come to the conclusion that linguopragmatic aspect is of utmost importance for a literary fiction writer trying to introduce both literary and linguistic concepts (as well as philosophical) peculiar to the discourse in question: Khaled Hosseini portrays his female characters as fighters, not as victims, which is a rather extreme idea for Muslim communities, especially rural Muslim communities of the past and present.

**Key words:** discourse, literary concept, feminism, gender characteristics, perception.

Дана робота має на меті дослідити деякі аспекти вербалізації гендерного дискурсу в сучасній літературі на основі художнього роману «Тисяча сяючих сонць» Халеда Хоссейні. Робота спрямована на дослідження двох головних жіночих персонажів роману Лейли та Мір'ям з точки зору фемінізму та актуалізації феміністського дискурсу під тиском релігійних (мусульманських) норм. Історія боротьби жінок за свої права, незважаючи, що ця боротьба є невід'ємною частиною історії людства, майже не відома пересічній більшості громадян, як чоловіків, так і жінок. Лише в останні десятиліття фемінізм став предметом громадських дискусій, наукових досліджень, а подекуди, навіть навчальною дисципліною в певних університетах. Боротьба жінок за свої права, як політичні, так і економічні, культурні і, в першу чергу, соціальні почала набирати оберти з появою суфражизму і цей процес далекий від завершення і до сьогодні. Останнім часом значною мірою зріс інтерес до жіночої історії, оскільки становище жінки в суспільстві – гостра соціальна проблема. Але, незважаючи на всі досягнення фемінізму, як і раніше у всіх сферах життя панують чоловіки, особливо коли мова йде про країни, громадяни яких сповідують іслам та дотримуються законів Шаріату. Ідеологія фемінізму, яка набула поширення в середині ХХ століття, значним чином здійснила вплив на спосіб мислення, життя, та поведінки жінок в суспільстві. Під час свого розвитку, фемінізм окреслився в різних напрямках, які, в свою чергу, формувалися під впливом суспільства. Гендерний аналіз дискурсу є одним із напрямків критичних дискурсивних досліджень, які зосереджуються на встановленні відповідностей між гендерною структурою суспільства та гендерно асиметричними структурами дискурсивних практик. Аналізуючи низку наукових праць (філософських, літературних, лінгвістичних тощо) автори приходять до висновку, що лінгвопрагматичний аспект має надзвичайно важливе значення для письменника, який намагається донести до читацької аудиторії поняття та концепти як літературні, так і лінгвістичні (а також філософські), які властиві тому чи іншому дискурсу або суспільству, про які йде мова у літературному творі. В романі Хоссейні жіночі персонажі постають як борці, а не як жертви, що є досить екстремальною ідеєю для мусульманських громад, особливо сільських мусульманських громад як минулого, так сьогодення.

**Ключові слова:** дискурс, літературна концепція, фемінізм, гендерні характеристики, сприйняття.

**Introduction:** History of philosophy and not only philosophy shows that anthropological issues have always been considered in terms of the abstract, the ideal person of the male sex – “the reasonable man”, “the rational man”. Moreover, this understanding was a particular methodological setting. Analyzing it, Lloyd shows in detail how the “concept of rationality” excludes all women from the sphere of power: While reading his scientific works, it is not tremendously difficult to notice that the pure Cartesian ego in its asexuality is still opposed to “a female being” [1, p. 16]. Lloyd accentuates that contemporary feminist criticism should not fall into the trap of the illusory exaltation of the feminine. It is not necessary to immediately include in this abstraction of the ideal rational man a female subject. Most likely, the task is to understand, clarify what features, characteristics unite men and women and on this basis to build an ideal human in terms of anthropological advancement [1, p. 138].

Theory in feminist studies is inseparable from practice. The return from general theoretical schemas to the meaning of a particular human life, the rehabilitation of another as a female subject – these became the new tasks of feminine discourse. For example, Sherwin, comparing the methodology of philosophy and the methodology of feminism studies, concludes that in traditional Western philosophy the method of Descartes – from universals to particulars has become widely acceptable, whereas, when we are talking about women studies it more reasonable to apply the Socratic one, which is from partial to general [2, p. 38].

Rejecting the opposition-based ontological model, feminine discourse offers the principle of differentiation and individualization, which is based on distinguishing elements within the system. It is assumed that the elements are not separated ontologically, but are always interconnected, interpenetrating each other, that is, always interconnected. Whitbeck's work, “Other Reality: Feminist Ontology” traces the substitution of the opposition “I vs. Another”, “Man vs. Woman” to the mode of “I and Another”, “Man and woman”, etc. [3, p. 78].

Thus, it can be concluded that, criticizing traditional philosophy, feminism does not seek to completely oppose itself to this philosophy; it only seeks alternatives that accept the significance of the “other”, that is, more human forms of expression of common knowledge. Trying to get away from abstract theoretical schemes as much as possible, feminine discourse builds a kind of alternative picture of the world, each element of which represents not the object of this system, but the subject, the bearer of individual, special differences with their history and meaning.

**The purpose** of this piece is to analyze linguistic characteristics of gender discourse on the basis of the novel “A Thousand Splendid Suns” by Khaled Hosseini. For achieving of this goal, it is planned to give general definition of feminist discourse, paying attention to its modern characteristics as well as address to verbalization of female characters in the novel.

**Methodology:** In the middle of XX century many scholars have paid attention to the influence of extralinguistic factors (cultural and sociolinguistic) on national languages. In the 40's and 50's of XX century the work of anthropologists and linguists has suggested that the gender of the speaker plays an important role in communication. Particularly noteworthy is the work of E. Sapir “Language, Culture and Personality”, which was published in 1949, in which the author, while analyzing the language of the Indian tribe, explored the use of the male and female subsystems of language and their communication with the concept of “gender”. The scholar has found out that the men of this tribe used masculine language for mutual communication, while the feminine language was used by women to communicate with representatives of both sexes. Therefore, in this case, there is a standard language that is widely used by all native speakers, and there is also a special “male” jargon [4].

Feminism and feminist studies have been conducted by scientists from different spheres of academia, from philosophy to linguistics to psychology. Among scientists who dwelt on topicality of feminism and gender studies are Z. Freud, W. Reich, M. Mead and others. If one mentions the Frankfurt school, it is worth mentioning such names as Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Adorno.

**Research and Discussion.** It is believed that feminism originates from the times of Renaissance, however we are more interested in the more recent manifestations connected with the movement in question. In the 1970s, a new wave of interest in women's speech began to emerge around the world, and naturally it was in the connection with the feminist movement. A group of scientists argued that women's use of certain stereotyped “feminine” forms had a negative effect on women's attempts to gain equal status in society. This view is also often found in the works of H. Abe, S. Ide, K. Marie, M. Nakamura, R. Lakoff and others. The main areas of study were: phonetics, morphology and lexicology. A classical work in this field is the study by R. Lakoff (1975) under the title “Language and the situation of women”. This work has caused a lot of controversy. The study lacks specific data. R. Lakoff took the male language

for the norm. This drew the attention of researchers not only from the point of view of the systematic study of language in general, but also from the point of view of the study of the male language in particular. Despite all the drawbacks, this work has become the basis of many studies of the phenomenon of female speech. It can be said that it initiated the inexhaustible flow of scientific work on the subject [5; 6].

In the late 1960s, the term “gender” was introduced first in history and sociology, and then in other sciences, widely used it to describe the stereotypes of “femininity” and “masculinity” that exist in different cultures. The main purpose of introducing the concept of gender is to distinguish between biological and social. It should be noted that the latter determines the strategies of behavior of the individual according to his or her biological sex. Changing the foundations of social life, in which the role of women of the traditional national mentality is increasing and gaining more importance and significance, causes the rapid development of gender studies in various fields of humanities, including linguistics, so the issue of the differentiation of speech into men and women is very relevant today. The main objective of our study is to find out the differences between the concepts of gender identification. Modern socio-psychological science distinguishes between gender and sex. Traditionally, the former has been used to refer to the anatomical and physiological features of humans, on the basis of which humans are defined as male or female. Sex (i.e. biological features) of a person was considered the foundation and root cause of psychological and social differences between women and men. With the development of scientific research, it became clear that from a social and cognitive point of view, there are far more similarities between men and women than differences [7, p. 43].

The differentiation of the concepts of gender and sex meant a new theoretical level of understanding of social processes. Women's studies are gradually evolving into gender studies, where approaches are put forward, according to which all aspects of human society, culture and relationships are gender-based. In modern science, the gender approach to the analysis of social and cultural processes and phenomena is much widely used. Gender research examines what roles, norms, values, and traits of attitudes women and men attach to society through socialization systems, work distributions, cultural values, and symbols to build traditional gender asymmetry and a hierarchy of power. All these things, naturally, found their reflection in literature and literary studies. Today all the texts, including fiction texts are analyzed from the perspective of intercultural and inter-

disciplinary studies. [8] The determination of such a linguistic-cultural phenomenon as the female text occurred in the second half of the 19th century. Over time, the scope of feminists' activities has expanded significantly, and they have become increasingly focused on the characteristics of women's mental, cultural and creative activities. Since 1940, feminist studies have been focusing on the analysis, classification, and definition of women's texts. In general, any text cannot be interpreted one-sidedly, i.e., only as a piece of information or opinion implemented into societal realm through word processing. It is a living and complex organism that accumulates in spiritual, mental, cultural universal and individual worldviews, experiences, phenomena, etc. It is customary to speak of woman's creativity as of one of the models of global and universal male creativity. In the practical interpretation of texts, most researchers use the male/female binary relationship to identify only one part – the male as the most important and the most perfect. Accordingly, the female text on the background of the male looks sluggish and defective, because its best features are selected and devoted to masculine creativity. [8] The “feminine” and “masculine” texts are semantically and semiologically meaningful. They convey a specific feminine and masculine perception of the world.

With regard to male and female tactics, women tend to ask questions more often, usually in order to continue the conversation in any way. A woman more often expresses her disagreement with the interlocutor's opinion in silence rather than open verbal protest. Means of verbal aggression to her are unacceptable. Women have a more polite nature, though a more assertive linguistic behavior. Women in conversations, as a rule, apologize more than men, in their turn men seek to dominate the conversation, manage its development, expresses their intentions directly, frankly, without using politically-correct and polite forms of words. The number of replicas of a man in a dialogue is usually larger and longer in duration than those of a woman [9].

Khaled Hosseini is an American writer of Afghan decent, who primarily writes about Afghanistan. He is a great advocate and supporter of Afghan culture and tradition, which originate from relatively times and are connected to Persia itself. He shows the way things were in Afghanistan before the Taliban rule; pays great attention to social and cultural norms that were mostly the case before 1970ies. As a contrast he also points out in detail the violence that pervades the Afghan society right before and in times of Taliban rule. He shows the mode of life and possible societal status women could and used to have

and at the same time for a greater contrast paints out the status quo for them. "A Thousand Splendid Suns" is a work of art based on real events. This is a story about two women, Mariam and Leila, and about the terrible things that happen to them in a society where men have absolute power and support through adherence to religious fanaticism.

From the very beginning, the author throws us into the world of Mariam, a young girl living alone with her unmarried mother on the outskirts of Herat. The young girl is being bullied by her mother, who is sick with epilepsy and dissatisfied with her ruined life. Mariam lives day by day with the thought of meeting her father, who runs a movie station in Herat; she dreams of becoming a member of the family in her father's house, which, according to tradition is very much unlikely to happen. The mother instills in her daughter hatred (for the girl herself and for everyone around), distrust, lack of confidence, etc. One of the worst things that a parent can do for a child is to deprive that child of education and development. However Mariam's mother goes even further – she eradicates even the thoughts of being literate from the girls head:

*"What's the sense in schooling a girl like you? It's like shining a spittoon. There is only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life [...]: tahamul. Endure" [10].*

Here is a clearly stated opinion: women from lower classes have no right even to think about literacy and education, and that opinion dominates the discourse in question, thus diminishing role of women within this very society.

On the other hand, Hosseini demonstrates through his texts that not everything is so radical and everything is not so radical. As Mariam's counterpart and in the future her friend and even daughter to some extent he pictures Leila. She is Rashid's (Mariam's husband's) second wife. Leila is the girl with a rather different background. She comes from a loving family, she had been schooled and she has a different attitude to life: she has desire to fight for things dear to her, she wants to fight for her future, for the right to be the one who chooses her own future.

Feminist discourse, women's studies, literary studies, all these are integral parts of wider and greater political discourse. These variations of discourses are acute with the regard to socio-cultural and political developments throughout the world, as far as it is those developments that find their reflection in texts in general and literary texts in particular. Hosseini does not dispute the usual western point of view of Afghanistan, but he enriches them; he adds more knowledge and concepts, and makes Afghans lively, real human beings who love and feel. He teaches

the reader to sympathize with them. Hosseini's prose is impassively direct, and he is inclined to explain not only political, but also personal stories, presenting each experience in a wrapper on which emotion is carefully marked. As it has been mentioned before, softness is one of the features that is characteristic of female being, that is a part of visualization and actualization of a female artistic image, which relates the features for the reader.

*"She had fallen for Tariq. Hopelessly and desperately" [10].*

What is both typical and typical for Muslim women, Hosseini shows transgression of his characters from victims to warriors to winners. In some regard, he is desperately trying to place his female characters within and at the same time out of traditional socio-cultural discourse: typically with Mujahidins and Talibs around the fight for women's rights was not a question. Women simply could not have what they wanted; they could not have love, freedom, education, they simply had no right to be happy, for the matter of fact. If we return to the oppositions, then the opposition "male – female" could be also presented as "master – slave" or "warrior – victim", however, in regard to Hosseini's characters we may say that they were not victims, but rather fighters, and that very fact sets them out of typical Muslim narrative of Afghanistan under Taliban rule. According to modern estimates, women are the most discriminated class in Islamic society because of cultural and religious beliefs, which can often be reflected in the laws of the Islamic world, affecting criminal justice, the economy, education, and healthcare. But still, Khaled Hosseini shows us that the girls of Islam have the right to education and independent existence, if they have to power and strength to fight for it. These basic human rights, typical for Western societies are not default mode for Muslim countries even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

*"By "out there" he didn't mean Kabul, which had always been relatively liberal and progressive. Here in Kabul, women taught at the university, ran schools, held office in the government. No, Babi meant the tribal areas, especially the Pashtun regions..." [10].*

Another aspect, the author accentuates is the difference between modern Islamic women and rural women. Modern Muslim women do not live a separate life – they can harmoniously integrate into society, without losing the awareness that they have chosen Islam as their religion. They do not stand out in the crowd with their black veils – because they will attract the attention of others even more, and sometimes they can even make a frightening impression on them:

*“These women were all swinging handbags and rustling skirts. Mariam even spotted one smoking behind the wheel of a car” [10].*

There is a lot of discussion about the role of Muslim women in the Islamic world and a lot of speculation has been put forward. Unfortunately, these discussions most often become negative. The most common notions about women are that they live in conditions of harsh dictatorship on the part of their husbands and fathers, are forced to marry, and, of course, suffocate from the heat under the veil. In terms of her position and role in society, a woman is constantly ridiculed. For centuries, man and woman have different roles in society.

A man opens up wider prospects for self-realization in the modern world. Women are called upon to create and maintain a family hearth; their task is to give birth and raise children. The proof is the words of the judge:

*“God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can. Western doctors and their science have proven this. This is why we require only one male witness but two female ones” [10].*

Gender is a specific set of cultural characteristics, which tends to recognize the social behavior of women and men. There are a lot of concepts about classes, races and ethnicity, and understanding “gender” is an analytical tool for studying social and cultural processes. Studying gender discourses is mostly typical for scientific literature, however, in our humble opinion, fiction may be a well of material for ana-

lyzes as well, as far it is fiction where the whole spectrum of real life emotions and situations is presented.

**Conclusion:** The role of women in modern society is a topical scientific issue for philosophers, literary scientists, linguists, psychologists and others these days. In the regard of Hosseini’s novels, it is worth stressing the fact that the author, being a man, nevertheless pays a great amount of attention to the role of women in most of his literary works, and this matter is the leitmotif of his novel “A Thousand Splendid Suns”. It is also evident that the stylistic reception in the works of the contemporary writer Hosseini has considerable linguopragmatic potential, which helps the author of the novels to fully realize his ideas and concepts. Turning to the sphere of feelings of the main female characters who play the role of the compared counterparts (the structure of such comparison, where the pragmatically determined intention of the author to reveal to the reader the ambivalent character of emotions experienced by the hero, is realized), the author draws a parallel between the spiritual (religious) world of a man and a real life (earthly and simple) world of a woman. One of the most important aspects of the narrative in “A Thousand Splendid Suns” in our opinion is representation of the main female characters (women) not as victims, but as fighters. Hosseini is trying to shift gender discourse to the advantage of women; he places women in the center of the narrative, makes them narrators, authors of their own stories rather than simply puppets participating in other people’s plays.

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