



***A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS-* A story of Hope and Love**

Dr. Roy Xavier

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Devamatha Arts and Science College

Paisakary, Kerala, India.

ABSTRACT

“In the spring of 2003, I went to Kabul, and I recall seeing these burqa-clad women sitting at street corners, with four, five, six children, begging for change”. “.....I thought, who is that person inside?...what makes her happy? What gives her sorrow? *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is in some ways my attempt at imagining answers to those questions”. (Postscript by Khaled Hosseini). Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul-the capital of Afghanistan. His father was a diplomat and mother was a teacher. The family received political asylum in the United States of America in 1980 following the Russian invasion in Afghanistan in 1978. He is a doctor and lives in North California. *The Kite Runner* is his first novel (2003), which tells the story of a young boy named Amir and his relationship with Hassan, the son of a servant and who also was Amir’s half-brother. The story tells about the jealousy Amir had towards Hassan and the true love and friendship they had been into, at the end of the story. Similarly Mariam and Laila had misunderstanding in the beginning. Mariam was jealous towards Laila, as she did not want to lose a little attention she got from her husband Rasheed, by the coming of Laila as the second wife of Rasheed. But both stories have a similar background of restless Afghanistan due to the invasion of Russia and other political confusion during Taliban rule. Those problems became the common hurdle which had to be overcome by the characters of the both

novels. Mariam became very kind towards Laila and she identified the thousand splendid suns which were glowing in the depth of their minds despite the poor social and political situation of their country. The title *A Thousand Splendid Suns* comes from a 17th century poem, an ode to the city of Kabul written by Saib-e-Tabrizi . “One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs, or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls”. Despite the walls of restrictions which hinder the peaceful lives in Kabul, the good minds of Mariam and Laila are like the splendid suns which give hope and love to the fellow beings!

Key words: Russian Invasion, Political confusion, splendid Suns, Taliban.

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini-the author visited his native city, Kabul in 2003. He had left Kabul for Paris in 1976 as his father got a job there. After the Russian invasion in 1978, Hosseini’s family fled Afghanistan for the United States receiving political asylum in 1980. Though the writer had been into restless and bitter experience for some time, he kept always an optimistic view about Afghanistan. It was due to his love and admiration towards his country, he penned novels about the plight of the children and women in the country during the Communist regime and Taliban rule in the country. In 2003, he published his debut novel, *The Kite Runner*. It is a story that tells the relationship of a boy and his father in a family. And also, “It was to tell myself a story that taken root in my mind about two boys: one conflicted, on unsure emotional and moral ground; the other pure, loyal, rooted in goodness and integrity” (Foreword: *The Kite Runner*). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini draws the picture of two girls, Mariam and Laila who happened to be the wives of the same man, Rasheed- an abusive and cruel person, in Kabul. Mariam, being an illegitimate child of Jalil, was forced to marry, at the age of 15, Rasheed a shoe maker who was 30 years older. Laila, another protagonist hailing from an educated and rich family, also became the wife of the same harsh and religious extremist man after the loss of her parents and brothers. Her lover Tariq had fled to Pakistan with his parents. Laila was impregnated by Tariq by that time. Having had no other options she received Rasheed as her husband. Mariam and Laila were not in good terms in the beginning but the circumstances brought them together to fight against the harsh situation created by their husband. At the end of the story we see that Rasheed was killed by Mariam in a fight for which she was executed by the Taliban. Laila got reunited with Tariq and she named her third child, Mariam. She wanted to pay a rich tribute

to her best friend, Mariam for the favors and love received from her. The story is divided into four parts- Mariam's childhood till her age of 15, Laila's birth during the time of Russian invasion in 1978, Social situation and the fate of Mariam and Laila in Kabul, and, The sorrows suffered by the protagonists in and out their house.

A Thousand Splendid Suns- A Story of Hope and Love

Khaled Hosseini unveiled the 'thousand splendid suns' that hid behind her (Afghanistan) wall, through his 2007 novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The political and societal atmosphere was polluted by the suppressive Communist regime and religious fundamentalist, Taliban for more than three decades in Afghanistan. The life of Mariam and Laila was darkened and hopeless due to their abusive husband, Rasheed. Despite these outer and 'inner' conflicts and turmoil, the author brings the effect of mutual love and resilience to go on with respect and hope in life. The story brings the pathetic plight of womenfolk in Afghanistan. Still he hopes to come back to the glorious past condition which he had experienced in early childhood. Hosseini ruminates over the Golden Years of the 1960s and 1970s when women enjoyed freedom of expression and movement. His mother was a teacher at a girls' school. But later the girls were forbidden from school. They had to cover their face while moved in public. He is feeling sad about the poor condition of Afghanistan and its people, especially that of the women and children. As the 17th century Afghan poet, Saib-e-Tabrizi hopes in his poem, *Kabul* that 'Every street of Kabul is entralling to the eye'(line 13), and, 'one could not count the moons that shimmer on her(Kabul's) roofs' 'And the thousand Splendid Suns that hide behind her walls' (Lines 15,16).

Nana was the mother of Mariam who was an illegitimate child of Jalil. When Mariam was 5 years old, she climbed a chair and took down her mother's Chinese tea set. It was the only relic that Nana's mother had left for her. Unfortunately, this tea set slipped from Mariam's fingers and fell down and shattered. "You are a little harami"(p.4). Mariam did not understand the meaning of the word, 'harami'. She felt so depressed and isolated when she understood the shame associated with the word later that the word meant 'bastard'. She missed the love and affection of her parents, as Nana was abandoned by Jalil after she was impregnated by him. The weekly visit of the Kolba by Jalil was the only relief she enjoyed. Jalil told her stories and history of Afghanistan's past glory. Jalil was a rich man who owned land, stores etc. He owned a cinema too. 'He had a cook, driver and three house keepers' (P.6). Nana had been one among them. Mariam lost the protection by her

father when she was just an embryo. He built a hut for Nana and sent her there. Nana would remind Mariam about the fate of women in the hand of rich persons like Jalil; ‘a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman’ (p.7).

Mariam was avoided by the members of the big family of Jalil which consisted of his three wives and nine children who are Mariam’s half brothers and sisters. She had only one friend called Mullah Faizullah, the elderly village Koran tutor. To add to her misfortune, political changes took place in Afghanistan. In 1973 when Mariam was fourteen, the king who ruled Afghanistan for 40 years was overthrown by the Russian forces. It increased the restlessness in the lives of the citizens. Mariam wanted to see a cinema in her father’s theatre and she hoped to go around in public with her father. Mariam expressed her wish to him for which he consented. But Jalil did not turn back the next day to pick up Mariam as he had promised. Mariam planned to go, against her mother’s will, to her father’s place. Nana said, “I’ll die if you go”(p.27). Everything happened- Mariam went to Herat and was sent back by Jalil’s family members, ‘she spent the night outside Jalil’s house’ (p.33), and on reaching her hut, Mariam found “The rope dropping from a high branch. Nana dangling at the end of it”(p.36).

After the death of Nana, Mariam was forced to marry a shoe maker in Kabul, Rasheed who was 30 years older than she. Rasheed hoped for a male baby and he proposed name, Zalmai. Mariam was still unlucky to give birth to a baby. A neighbour saw Mariam crying and bleeding- she had an abortion. It repeated many times and Rasheed became more arrogant and harsh towards Mariam. In the first part we read the birth, life and marriage of Mariam.

In the second part, we see the birth, the societal and political condition of Afghanistan during the childhood of Laila, the second protagonist in the novel. She was born in 1978, when the Soviet invasion happened. Laila lost her two brothers and parents as the fight against the Communist forces with the Mujahideen continued. Tariq who was crippled in the fights came to contact with Laila and when she was 14, they had sexual intercourse. Tariq and family wanted to leave for Pakistan. But Laila became lonely and helpless. Knowing the pathetic condition of the girl, Rasheed sent a marriage proposal to her through an aide of his. Laila became the second wife of Rasheed who was much older than she. Mariam was reluctant to receive Laila in the beginning. Laila

gave birth to a girl who Laila had conceived by Tariq. The birth of a girl, that too of another man, was a matter of much anger of Rasheed towards Laila. It was this matter of Rasheed's anger and abusive behavior, that brought Mariam and Laila together. They began to fight for peace and freedom. This common plan made them good friends. They fought together till the end of Rasheed's death. Mariam, who beat Rasheed with a shovel, to his death, was executed by the Taliban. Now Laila was alone to protect herself and her children. Fortunately, Tariq had come to town for her protection. A girl was born to them, whom they called, Mariam. The life of Mariam and Laila was like a Sun which shined in the darkness of religious extremism and political chaos in Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini believes there are *A Thousand Splendid Suns* of love and care behind the walls of the country.

Conclusion

A Thousand Splendid Suns focuses on the bitter experiences of women and children in Afghanistan during the time of the political uncertainty. Mariam and Laila were two girls who were born and brought up in different family atmosphere, but they faced the same problem due to the political condition of the country. The rules imposed upon women were so harsh and cruel. This condition of theirs brought them together and they behaved with friendship, resilience and the enduring power of love. The story is fictitious though some incidents and time given in the novel, are real. The author tries to bring out certain problems of the society in general, and he also views everything in a positive way that he hopes to overcome the problems.

REFERENCES

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