



Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*: A Saga of Unconventional Relationships

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Abstract— Khaled Hosseini has gained notoriety as a result of his accurate portrayal of his homeland, Afghanistan. His tales are set against Afghanistan's history, culture, custom, and ethnic variety. His novels' themes are not limited to a single country or culture; rather, they show the sufferings, struggles, and adventures that are shared by many nations and cultures. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* follows the lives of two female protagonists, Mariam and Laila, and how their paths cross following a series of dramatic occurrences. The novel then tracks their ongoing relationship and support for one another in Kabul from the 1970s to the 2000s. The tale is set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's post-Soviet invasion insecurity. It also goes into detail about life under the Taliban rule. The tale highlights the plight of 'Afghani-women' over the conflict's long years. This research paper minutely traces at unconventional relationships and their amalgamation in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The novel is broken into four sections, each of which focuses on different stories. It provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of how women in other countries are treated, and continue to be treated, today.



Keywords— Relationships, Afghanistan, Belongingness, Intimacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

A Thousand Splendid Suns was well-received by critics and ushered to become one of the best international bestsellers. Hosseini describes the existing socio-political situation in Afghanistan masterfully in all of his novels. In this novel, Khaled Hosseini depicts Afghanistan as a country beset by violence, which has wreaked havoc on human connections. He reveals that Afghan women have heartbreaking experiences to tell since they are the most vulnerable victims of the battle. His works, among other things, focus on the impact of human interactions on a society that must constantly undergo undesirable as well as uncontrollable changes owing to conflict. Hosseini emphasizes his worry over the Afghan people's suffering, particularly the plight of Afghan women, whom he regards as doubly marginalized on the one hand, by society, and on the other, within the four walls of their homes in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

A major component that offers strength to the characters against the backdrop of such a shattered milieu is the bond of love, treatment of their relationships and loyalty as reflected in his three novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Mountains Echoed*.

Khaled Hosseini's writings are unique that they deal with the junction of conflict and human beings. The struggle is both literal and territorial in nature. In particular, very few publications about the Afghan conflict deal with the idea of human beings negotiating with active territorial conflict.

Question of Research

This paper will examine Khalid Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from the perspective of research. It will offer perceptive insights into human existence in conflict situations, as well as understanding the dynamics of how the basic notion of a connection alters in a conflict context.

Outline of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the complex dynamics of human interactions in connection to conflict. The paper focuses at the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to see how it depicts the extremes of oppression and brutality that Afghan women face in their society. The paper also focuses on the difficult circumstances that Afghan women faced, notably during the Taliban regime. It also examines women's inequitable and cruel treatment, as well as the hardship, prejudice, and violence that Afghan women have had to undergo. The paper will be centred on analytic and critical examination of primary text.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although not much has been written about Khaled Hosseini, nevertheless some research has been done on his novels, focusing primarily on feminist and other historical viewpoints, but the issue of human relationships in relation to conflict has remained largely neglected. Khaled Hosseini said in an interview that the scorching reality of two Afghan ladies compelled him to create this novel. (Denver post). Some publication, such as Rebecca Stuhr's Reading Khaled Hosseini (2009), analyse Hosseini's novels in light of contemporary events and popular culture. She discussed Hosseini's novels in light of current events and popular culture. It also includes a summary of Hosseini's life and an introduction to his novels. The book analyses the characters as well as the structure and topics of Hosseini's works. Mateja Kocjan's *The Unveiled Face of Afghanistan* is another book about the author Kocjan. She talks on Khaled Hosseini's biography and background, as well as the portrayal of women in the work. In 2015, Nurul Istikomah wrote 'Women's Attitudes Towards Gender Discrimination' in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. 'Gender Bias Crossing Borders: With Reference to Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*' by P. Struthi is another scholarly essay that examines the brutality and challenges that Afghan women experience in their daily lives.

The Canvas of the Novel

The fate of Afghan women over the lengthy decades of conflict is depicted in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It's a big storey with a lot of characters in it. It follows the lives of two women, Mariam and Laila, and how their paths meet as a result of a sequence of tragic events. In the background, it tracks their future relationship and support for one another. The tale is set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's post-Soviet invasion insecurity. It also goes into detail about life under the Taliban rule.

Hosseini has deftly portrayed the inner lives of the individuals, which are influenced by external forces and in some ways chronicle and determine their fate. It depicts the chaotic lives of three generations of women. It is written from the perspective of women, and it reflects Afghan women's attitudes across three generations. The novel has four parts, which focus on separate stories. The first half tells the narrative of Mariam's youth, family, and her tumultuous marriage to Rasheed. Part two traces on the sickness of Laila, as well as her loss of parents and siblings. Part three depicts two ladies, Laila and Mariam, who have a deep bond and relationship. It also covers their friendship, Rasheed's death, and Mariam's ultimate sacrifice for Laila. The final section focuses on Laila's relationship with Tariq. In part two, we meet Laila, the lone girl in her family who is constantly harassed by her mother and is subjected to discrimination. Laila's mother adores her boys who perished in Afghanistan during the conflict. She was born and raised in Kabul, and she has a close bond with Tariq, a little kid who lives in her neighbourhood. Despite being conscious of the societal limits between men and women in Afghan society, they finally begin a romantic relationship. During this time, Afghanistan is at war, and Kabul is being bombarded with rocket assaults. Tariq's family decides to leave the city, and Laila and Tariq share an emotional goodbye that ends with them making love. Laila's family likewise decides to flee Kabul, but as they pack their belongings, a missile hits their home, killing her parents and seriously injuring Laila. Rasheed and Mariam eventually take Laila in as their own.

In her review of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Katherine Kervick says: "The experiences of two female protagonists, Mariam and Laila, and their lives and roles as women in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan are chronicled in this novel"(hercampus). The book delves into the unjust and cruel treatment of women, including their hardship and discrimination, as well as the cruelty and violence they were forced to face. Khaled Hosseini, the author, does not sugarcoat the cruelty and wickedness; he tells it like it is...

"*A Thousand Splendid Suns* provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of how women in other countries are treated, and continue to be treated, today"(7).It brings awareness and reality to folks who may not have been aware of what was going on. Hosseini describes women's lives in a time when they had little, if any, rights. Women are forced to wear a Burqa by their dominating husbands, from being born out of wedlock to child marriages. (paragraph 1)

The novel is intertwined into the web of human relationships. The novel's foundation is relationships,

through which we encounter many topics and motifs meant to be portrayed by the author. So, before we go into detail about the various topics raised in the novel, we must first define the nature of relationships and their significance in the storey. The novel is a love storey, but the beginning of the book lays the groundwork for the book's more complicated and bigger topics. Mariam is referred to as a "*Harami*" (bastard or illegitimate child) by Nana, implying that her birth was the result of an extramarital liaison. Mariam herself refers to her upbringing as *Harami* in the novel's last section. Mariam, on the other hand, had an excellent relationship with her father. Every week, he used to pay a visit to Mariam and spend time with her. A wonderful father-daughter bond is depicted. Unlike Mariam's mother, he never referred to her as illegitimate. He cared after Mariam when her mother died. He wanted to retain Mariam in his home, but his women wouldn't let her, so he married her to Rasheed, a middle-aged shoemaker. However, he was dissatisfied with his decision, and Laila discovers a letter written by Mariam's father after Mariam's death. On the other hand, according to social standards, Jalil looks to be the gold standard for legitimacy. However, his status as a parent is put into doubt as he disappoints Mariam and then denies her presence at his house. Jalil's connection with Nana and Mariam, on the other hand, reveals his embarrassment at having a second family. In the storey, both Mariam and Nana frequently express hope. Mariam expresses her desire for reconciliation with Jalil, encouraging him to strengthen their bond by taking her to the movies. Nonetheless, both characters' optimism turns to despair, a pattern that continues throughout the narrative. Mariam's insistence on going to school and Nana's reluctance is the start of a conversation regarding women's education that runs throughout the novel.

The author of *Status of Women: Afghanistan*, Wali M. Rahimi, claims that women in Afghanistan have always had a lower status than males. (6) The storey begins with a description of Mariam and Nana's connection. Mariam's mother, Nana, lives with her in a Kolba in a hamlet near Herat. She is marginalised and isolated from society because she is considered to be guilty. She is rejected and abandoned, which is the source of her discontent. Her father disowns her, which is a tragedy for her. She is abandoned in the village to deliver the kid on her own. Mariam is Nana's lone connection to the outside world. She is highly possessive of her daughter as a result of her loneliness. She says to Mariam "You're all I have. I won't lose you to them" (*A Thousand Splendid Suns* 18). She is the novel's most fascinating character, having been offended, rejected, and imprisoned in a hut by her owner. Nana is intensely resentful of both men and

tradition, and she sees the truth in both. Mariam and Rasheed have a complicated connection. She is constantly worried because she is dissatisfied with her marriage. Rasheed and Mariam's marriage is not joyful since she was coerced and tugged to marry him. Rasheed, as a domineering spouse, does not allow Mariam to live her life as she desires. He is overjoyed when Mariam becomes pregnant for the first time, but quickly becomes disillusioned when Mariam miscarries a kid. He gets aggressive towards her and begins to beat her on a daily basis. Mariam has a series of miscarriages, and Rasheed grows increasingly angry and aggressive against her. Mariam's inability to give birth to a child is the root of their strained relationship. Rasheed regarded Mariam as his personal property and thought that Islam gave him authority as well.

He says, "There is no shame in this Mariam, ... in order to further repress Mariam. It's something married couples do"(5). Rasheed tortures Mariam often in the name of Islam, despite the fact that he has never followed its pious precepts. When he received company, he used to lock her up and compel her to wear a Burqa. She does everything for Rasheed and complies with all of his requests, but nothing seems to satisfy him. His personality reveals a beast's actual nature. **Hosseini's Portrayal**

In Afghan society, a woman's survival is inextricably linked to her ability to reproduce. Hosseini digs brilliantly into the lives of these women in a culture where they are solely valued for copulation and breeding. Mariam, on the other hand, accepts Rasheed's physical and psychological domination as her lot in life since she views it as normal. Mariam's marriage becomes a prison for her after a series of miscarriages. She feels terrible about her miscarriages and sees them as a punishment from God. She learns to accept whatever comes her way calmly, although it is not easy for her. Hosseini makes it obvious that Rasheed's verbal and physical abuse of Mariam stems mostly from her inability to provide him with a son to carry on his name. Rasheed, a low-class guy, believes he is incapable of handling his wife and forbids them from going outdoors. As a result of his insecurity, he pushes his wife to wear Burqas so that he can feel dominant and like he has control over things. When Rasheed marries Mariam, he makes her wear a Burqa and effectively imprisons her in his home. Rasheed is blissfully unaware of his egoism and intolerance since he sees power over Mariam as normal. Other ladies come to his store in order to further oppress Mariam, he says. He thinks such ladies are unethical since they don't wear a Burqa:

"I have clients, Mariam, guys who come to my business with their spouses. The

ladies approach me bare-chested, speak to me frankly, and look me in the eyes without shame. They dress up with cosmetics and knee-length skirts. The women will sometimes put their feet in front of me for measurements, while their husbands stand by and watch. They permit it. They don't mind if someone touches their wives' naked feet! They consider themselves to be modern men intellectuals, owing to their schooling, I guess. They are blind to the fact that they are squandering their own nang and namoos, as well as their dignity and pride. (*A Thousand Splendid Suns* 69)

When Mariam enters Rasheed's room and discovers magazines with nude women in his drawer, her hypocrisy is exposed. She attempts to figure out why Rasheed insisted on her wearing a Burqa while he was actually inspecting the intimate parts of other women:

"Why did Rasheed insist that she cover when he thought nothing of looking at the private areas of other men's wives and sisters?" (*A Thousand Splendid Suns* 82).

Rasheed entrapped Laila in marriage with him after Mariam became old. When Rasheed marries Laila, a fourteen-year-old girl, the tension between Mariam and her authoritarian husband becomes even more complex. Rasheed's desire also takes a toll on Laila. Tariq had been her favourite since she was a youngster. Hakim and Fariba's daughter is an ethnic Tajik. Unlike Mariam, she is a lovely and well-educated young lady. Laila's father is a university graduate and a teacher who wants his daughter to be educated and serve the country. He was a liberal thinker who saw women's education as being on par with men. The urban and rural worlds, as well as educated and illiterate families, are in stark contrast. Mariam, who came from a rural family with ignorant ancestors, was told not to bother about schooling. Laila's father assisted her with schoolwork and aided her in obtaining the top spot in the class. He is a man who values women's education equally as much as he values men's.

Laila and Tariq's Relationship

The young Laila and Tariq's friendship is a welcome diversion from Mariam and Rasheed's difficult situation. Tariq holds a special place in Laila's heart. Despite the fact that they are not bound by the restrictions of marriage as Mariam and Rasheed are, their relationship with one another appears to be far more genuine, and may even be termed real love. The physical closeness between Laila and Tariq is more comparable to making love than

the harsh and forced sex between Mariam and Rasheed. Though Tariq and Laila's deed is illegal in Afghan society and probably regarded illegitimate, it appears to the reader to be a real gesture of love. The fact that Tariq and Laila are no longer together implies that they will suffer as a result of their split. The real love shared by Laila and Tariq is contrasted with the societal fabrication of marriage that Laila accepts out of desperation for her unborn child. Rasheed dismisses Mariam's sentiments in the situation, demonstrating that their marriage lacks respect and equality.

The Shocking Turn in the Story

Mariam walks down to the tool shed and grabs a shovel. She knows she'll use it on Rasheed, but she doesn't want to be a coward and strike him without his awareness. She called Rasheed's name because she wanted him to see and then smacked him across the temple, knocking him out. Mariam believed that if Laila was to survive, she needed to take Rasheed's life. Her womanhood compels her to seek explanations for the humiliation and brutality she experienced during her marriage.

The Sacrifice of Mariam

Rasheed's death ended the story's struggle and granted Laila and Aziza their independence, but Mariam joined the Taliban. For the murder of Rasheed, she was condemned to death. Laila, Tariq, Aziza, and Zalmai escaped to Murree, Pakistan, and the next day, Laila and Tariq married. Mariam is the one who kills Rasheed, frees everyone, and then has herself executed. Her death, like Nana's, becomes the catalyst for her emancipation. Only because of Rasheed's death does life go on, and it's worth noting that Mariam is the same traumatized lady who, with the assistance of Laila, murders Rasheed. Mariam's dual existence as a kid is revealed at the start of the story. Nana's stark realism has imbued her with a feeling of desire for a better existence. Jalil offers a fresh viewpoint on life, one that is whimsical and devoid of anything harsh or terrible. Mariam is physically and intellectually normal, yet she is marginalised only because of her *Harami* identity.

One of the most remarkable similarities among Hosseini's female protagonists is that they are all trapped inside a vicious loop of guilt that they strive to break by hurting themselves. Mariam appears to be silently enduring all of the brutal beatings and accusations as a result of her mother's infertility. She has an odd notion that her pain is the result of her own previous acts...

Mariam had never been taught to question or defy her circumstances. She's been enslaved in every way: emotionally, socially, physically, and mentally. She

accepts her sufferings as God's will and becomes deafeningly silent.(458) Nana's focus on Mariam's ability to persevere in the face of adversity not only foreshadows Mariam's grim future, but also the sort of teachings Mariam must have absorbed as a kid in Nana's home. Mariam's talent for endurance is ultimately what permits her to withstand awful surroundings and dismal personal losses throughout the rest of the story. Mariam also becomes strong and solid enough to tolerate her surroundings as she grows older, but she is rarely proactive enough to change her circumstances—a pattern of behaviour that most likely mirrors her upbringing. Mariam's new existence is restricted to Rasheed, she as a result of Rasheed's insistence that she wear a Burqa, which hides her identity from the world outside of Rasheed. Rasheed's selfish, protective personality, which would eventually lead to abuse, is foreshadowed by Mariam's Burqa demand. Mariam's Burqa required her to be obedient to her husband, but it also provided her with a sense of security. Rasheed's second wife, Laila, feels the same way about the Burqa.

Relationships as Portrayed by Hosseini

Jalil and Nana, Jalil and his three wives, Rasheed and Mariam, Rasheed and Laila, Mariam and Laila, and Tariq and Laila are among the numerous relationships shown in the story. Except for the two that were founded on real faith and love, these relationships were doomed to fail due to incompatibility.

Nana was a sex object for Jalil. Nana suffered greatly as a result of their sex-driven relationship, and she committed herself. Mariam only married Rasheed because she had had enough of Jalil's women. She was attempting to flee Jalil's wretched existence, but fate was not on her side, as her fate placed her in a more difficult situation with Rasheed than previously. Rasheed was the sadist, and there was no one who could stop him. Mariam saw it as a burden rather than a marriage.

Laila, on the other hand, married Rasheed just to give her pregnant kid a name. Laila and Rasheed had no connection, and the chasm was widened even more when Tariq returned to Laila's life after ten years. Laila and Tariq had a loving and respectful relationship, but it was not legally binding. Only two successful partnerships, however, have endured the test of time. After 10 years, Tariq and Laila recognise and accept their love since time has not been able to separate them.

Laila paid an appropriate homage to Mariam

Laila paid an appropriate homage to Mariam by naming her daughter child Mariam, a name that had always held a special place in her heart. Throughout the work, Hosseini depicts the consequences of warfare, war,

and the misery that people have to endure. The fighting between several factions instilled dread and stress in the Afghan people's psyche. Many people's lives were damaged by the Taliban's brutal reign, notably the lives of Afghan women. The impact of war and violence on human relationships is depicted in the novel. In Laila's instance, violent events were the catalyst for her entry into Rasheed's home. While battling with the Soviets, Hakim and Fariba's children, Ahmad and Noor, are murdered, symbolising the incursion of Afghan politics into the personal lives of the novel's protagonists. Their deaths represent the ultimate sacrifice of their ideals, as well as their families' grief. Hosseini describes all that has transpired in his nation in great detail. He recounts all of the Afghan people's sufferings, efforts, and difficulties during the battle. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a good example of Hosseini's usage of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to symbolise the strife and hostility that transpired in Afghanistan. Women's misery and persecution increased as a result of the conflict. Taliban were first well-received and embraced by various segments of Afghan society.

III. CONCLUSION

Mariam and Laila's deep tie of love is described in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a woman-to-woman romance. While, there are numerous hypotheses, they all boil down to the reality that conflict has had a substantial impact on human relationships throughout diverse communities and cultures. Mariam, Laila, and other female characters are subjected to horrors by Hosseini. The story is based on a number of unusual relationships, all of which prove to be disastrous in the end. Most women would have been destroyed by the type of suppression and persecution Mariam and Laila had to endure, yet Khaled Hosseini creates these women characters in such a manner that their souls stay unbroken. The female characters get close and form strong ties, opposing their husbands' and the government's nefarious plans. Various familial ties are created throughout the story among various individuals. Nana derives strength and power from her daughter Mariam, and Mariam, in turn, derives strength and power from Laila. Although their fate is tragic, the story demonstrates that women have a great ability to find strength and support from one another. It is the creation and blending of their uniqueness that supports them in times of hardship and misfortune. Mariam would not have been able to find the fortitude to battle Rasheed if she had not gained Laila's trust and affection. She becomes a symbol of bravery for all women who have been persecuted by the Taliban and patriarchy. Laila would not have been able to return to Afghanistan

and participate in the country's growth without Mariam's support and assistance. Laila's return to Afghanistan is a triumph for women who have been victims of abuse. Various parts of the world are afflicted by war in one form or another. While addressing the subject of human connections, Hosseini shows diverse father-son relationships. As a result, conflict circumstances tend to alter society's basic structure. Nonetheless, they are a sign of hope and optimism, hoping that the tide would turn and they will be able to live a decent life.

The many individuals form alliances in order to combat the tyranny that has plagued Afghanistan for decades. It also looks at how the Afghan people's lives were affected by the territorial struggle. Later, this paper focused that Hosseini's works are set against a backdrop of political turmoil and uncertainty. To define the position of a parent in one's family, he represents the love, conflict, and challenges that exist between dads and sons.

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