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THE MAGIC OF LOVE AMIDST THE WAR BETWEEN COUNTRIES AND FAMILIES – AN INTROSPECTION INTO KHALED HOSSEINI'S "A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS"

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ABSTRACT

Every individual on the earth wants to lead a peaceful life. It's too far for the rank and file in the society to lead a life in a serene atmosphere. The political influences, the prices going through the roof, the unhealthy competition growing on between the civilians, the influence of economic status etc can be considered as the main impediments. Though it is not impossible, love alone can make the human beings lead a tranquil and comfortable life, amidst the chaos in the society. The present article focuses on how love could win over the tribulations and overcome their predicaments through the characters penned from Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. In spite of the age difference the two feminine leads Mariam Jo and Laila marry the same man Rasheed, who ill treats women. The writer shows how the sensitiveness in family relations grows between the two wives and makes one of them to sacrifice her life for the happiness of the other. It is again love that makes them to triumph over the desperate struggle against violence, hunger and terror. The writer carefully interweaves the story by balancing the political history and common man's struggle in a country where life is at stake for a common man.

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INTRODUCTION

Life is not a bed of roses. Everyone on this earth suffer in one way or the other. But as human beings we aim for a life which is free from tribulations. When we watch a movie or when we read a novel, we feel and look into the characters as if they are closely related to us. Wherever we are on this earth, be a native or an alien the sufferings and happiness are one and the same, may the intensity varies. Khaled Hosseini could successfully bring out his internal emotions with respect to his country. Though he stays in America, his second novel "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*" reveals his reminiscences of thirty years of turbulent Afghan history. His family also moved to America where he became a doctor. He optimistically returned to his home land after twenty seven years. Several incidents from his life are reflected in the story like he shows how Laila's father Baba wanted girls to be educated as Afghanistan needs educated women. Khaled's mother herself taught Farsi and History to students while they were in Afghanistan.

"*A Thousand Splendid Suns*" is a heart touching story. It moves the reader's inner conscience as the novel revolves through wars, struggle between the family members and starvation. The

story starts with Mariam Jo's introduction as a five year old girl, who eagerly waits for her father, Jalil Khan, who visits her only on every Thursday. Her only companion was her mother Nana, who was molested in the hands of Jalil Khan and decided to lead a secluded life away from the prying eyes. Nana hates her distressful life and shows her agony by calling Mariam as *harami*, though the girl doesn't understand the meaning of it. Even though she wasn't the legitimate heir as her nine siblings, Jalil was a true hero in her eyes as she was always happy with him. Mariam was a simple girl who loved both her parents. In spite of her mother warnings she trusted her father and gets shocked when he gets her married to an aged man and sends her to Kabul with him. One can imagine how her heart ached when she says, "Don't come. I won't see you. Don't you come? I don't want to hear from you. Ever. Ever"(55).

Mariam had a happy life on the kolba until she desired to watch a movie in her father's theatre with her brothers and sisters. Mariam expected her father to take her to his theatre as her birthday gift. She waited for him on the day and he didn't come to take her, she alone went to search for her father as she knew he was one of the well-known wealthiest people in Herat. She couldn't imagine that she wouldn't be accepted by her father in his own house. She was shocked after the night she stayed

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outside the gate, she feels, “how she had fretted over what dress to wear, over the mismatching *hijab*, walking all the way here, refusing to leave, sleeping on the street like a stray dog.”(35). For the first time in her life she feels her mother was right in guessing her father’s attitude.

Unfortunately Mariam dived with death. Nana committed suicide the minute she found Mariam left for her father. By the time Mariam could understand the realities in her life, she lost her mother who could alone save her life. Things were out of her hand and she was taken to her father’s house and unable to bear her they send her away to Kabul. There were none to consider her feelings and she had to accept whatever they have done to her. She wanted to meet her only consoler Mullah Faizullah, who was a tutor to her before she had left to Kabul. She feels happy when he comes to visit her at her father’s house. He tries to pacify her guiltiness by saying, ‘You see, I knew your mother before you were born, when she was a little girl, and I tell you were born, when she was a little girl, and I tell you that she was unhappy then. The seed for what she did was planted ago, I’m afraid. What I mean to say is that this was not your fault. It wasn’t your fault, my girl.’ (43). May be it was not entirely her fault, but the ultimate sufferer was Mariam.

Mariam Jo started her married life with forty five years Rasheed in a new place which was almost 650kms away from her hometown. Rasheed looked after her well for few days until she started miscarrying. God didn’t show mercy on her and she had distressful days. Rasheed treated her brutally and she had none to care for. At that tender age she had no support, but her patience and silence made her to tolerate everything. The days passed on in Kabul with the political influences and wars which disturbed the serene life of people. The Russians, the Taliban attacks had their own affect on the layman’s life. Amidst the political chaos, her life was too pitiable. Mariam’s innocence over the political history made him irritated adding the fuel to fire as she couldn’t continue his inheritance. Mariam’s patience moves the hearts of the readers. Rasheed’s behavior makes the readers feel sorry for her. “Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer.” (102). Is it the position of a woman who cannot give birth to a child? Is it her fault? She only prayed to god, “Give sustenance, Allah. Give sustenance to me.” (95). What more can a helpless woman do?

Laila was another victim of a struggling family. Her Babi was optimistic and a patriot. He sent his sons to fight for their country and his wife was unhappy about it and she confined to bed without caring for Laila or her husband. Apart from this she always quarreled with her husband. The constant fights between her parents made Laila helpless. The only friend who could console her was Tariq. Tariq’s family was entirely different from Mariam’s or Laila’s family. Laila was well received at Tariq’s home and she feels comfortable in the presence of their parents. She says, ‘Tariq’s mother never looked pitiable in it. What Laila saw was the calm, self-assured face beneath the wig, the clever eyes, the pleasant, unhurried manners.’ (127).

The lives of the common people were not in their hands. Laila’s father was a practical man and he wanted his daughter to continue her education as he feels one day Kabul needs educated women. He says to Laila, “Women have always had it hard in this country, Laila, but they’re probably more free now, under the communists, and have more rights than they’ve ever had before.” (133). But things were not so easy. Life has become a challenge to the citizens. Laila’s family fate was overturned with the death of her two brothers. As the political situations were not favourable, many of the inhabitants tried to move to a safer place. Laila was shocked at Giti’s death. Giti died in a bomb attack while she was returning from school. Her feelings show her pathetic situation. “At last Laila began to weep for her friend. And all the tears that she hadn’t been able to shed at her brother’s funeral came pouring down.” (175)

Laila was left only with Tariq. Though Tariq was handicapped, Laila was attracted to Tariq. Their intimate relation made her to be close with Tariq. Her mother who never cared for Laila was also conscious as she knew Tariq was growing and becoming a man. She indirectly warns her daughter about their friendship. She says, “It was one thing when you were little kids running around. No harm in that. It was charming. But now. Now.” (159) Everybody likes to be recognized and that recognition comes from love. Laila was not cared as a daughter should be cared by a mother in her teenage. The conditions prevailing around the country threw them into a depressed state. All the families started to move from Kabul, away from the state. Laila missed her friend Hasina who fled to Tehran, Giti’s parents and siblings who moved to Iran. She could see the vacant houses were captured by the militiamen. Tariq also left with his parents to Pakistan. Before he left to Pakistan he came to bid good bye to Laila where they opened their hearts and souls. Laila’s mother who was reluctant to leave Kabul at last agreed to leave her homeland and start a fresh life on an alien land. Unfortunately when it was time for them to leave a bomb consumed their lives leaving poor Laila alone.

Laila’s life took an unexpected turn. She was cared by the Rasheed’s family and after a few days he wanted to marry Laila. Laila also had no other option as she was already carrying the child of Tariq in her womb and also had been deluded by Rasheed with the news of Tariq’s death in a distant land. Though Mariam was not happy at this she could do nothing. She was not happy at his idea of marrying a girl of his daughter’s age. When she tries to put forward this sensitive point he logically replies to her. ‘What of it? What? She’s too young, you think? She’s fourteen. Hardly a child. You were fifteen, remember? My mother was fourteen when she had me. Thirteen when she married’ (208). Were the days not different? May be his mother had married his father who was only a few years older to her. Mariam had a heartless father who married her to an old man. Now the circumstances made Laila to marry Rasheed who is at the age of a grandfather.

Laila was well cared as Rashid expected the baby as his own. He cared and looked after her like a princess until a girl, Aziza was born to her. Aziza looked like her mother, but was not adored by her father as she was a girl. Though Mariam and Laila didn’t have a close relation in the beginning slowly they

began to develop an intimate relation between them as they had suffered a lot my patriarchal domination. Laila's fanatic thoughts were welcomed by Mariam and they decided to escape from Rasheed and move to Pakistan. Women were deprived of moving alone in the street without burqa and accompanied by a male relative. So Laila carefully planned to manage things but she was caught in the last minute as the man whom she trusted would help them in clearance had cheated them and they were handed over to Rasheed again. Rasheed as usual showed his brutality in an inhuman way. "Laila didn't see the punch coming. One moment she was talking and the next she was on all fours, wide-eyes and red-faced, trying to draw a breath. It was as if a car had hit her at full speed, in the tender place between the lower tip of the breastbone and the belly button" Rasheed had not given them any food, and worse, no water. The room turned into a pressure cooker." (263) But the two women could survive the difficult situation helping each other.

Mariam had started to spend her time more with Aziza and Laila had given birth to a son Zalmai. Zalmai was brought like a prince by his father. When the days were going on happily for Rasheed with his son, the Talibans came to power and imposed many strict rules on the common people. The things became worse due to droughts and Rasheed failed to take care of his family as his workshop was burnt down. Mariam tried to seek the help of her father but it failed as she couldn't get any information about him on the telephone. Aziza, a six year old girl was send to a rescue house due to poverty that moved her mother to do it. When Rasheed denied accompanying her to the orphanage to see Aziza, her motherhood made her move alone tolerating the atrociousness. "If she was lucky, she was given a tongue-lashing or a single kick to the rear, a shove in the back. Other times, she met with assortments of wooden clubs, fresh tree branches, short whip, slaps often fists. A Talib beat Laila with a radio antenna. When he was done, he gave a final whack to the back of her neck and said, "I see you again, I'll beat you until your mother's milk leaks out of your bones." (313)

The fortune of Laila changes when one day she suddenly meets Tariq. Zalmai says to his father about Tariq's arrival and he brutally handles Laila and throttles her. Mariam's twenty seven years of tolerance, patience and conviction towards her belief were moved away when her beloved and affection Laila was suffering for life in the hands of Rahseed.

To overcome this daunting obstacle she kills Rasheed with a shovel. "Mariam saw that she was no longer struggling. *He's going to kill her*, she thought. *He really means to*. And Mariam could not, would not, allow that to happen. He'd taken so much from her in twenty-seven year of marriage. She would not watch him take Laila too." (340) The writer had exhibited her startling heroism which is a turning point in this story. She happened to free herself and Laila whom she treated like her daughter from the brutal animal. Mariam who was an unfortunate woman had also ended her life unfortunately as she was hung for killing her husband. She was happy because she could give a new life to Laila who suffered like her with her husband Rasheed. How pity it was as she feels if that day she could hear to Nana, may be her life would have no twists and

would have lead a happy life near her mother. None can change the fate. Though it was not her mistake she paid a lot for her birth.

On the other hand as Laila had no other option she left Mariam and left with Tariq a strong-willed and a bright person. Tariq who was having a secured life could make Laila, Aziza and Zalmai comfortable. He could shower love even on Zalmai though he was not his son. After a few days they wanted to return to their place and on their way she met Mariam's old friend and teacher's son who handed her a cover.

She spends some time in the place where Mariam had a happy life when she was a child. Leila decides to be in her hometown and feels enlightened to look at the changes that had started to arise in the city of Kabul. "She hears of schools built in Kabul, roads repaved, women returning to work, and her life here, pleasant as it is, grateful as he is for it seems.... insufficient to her. Babi's voice in her head. *You can be anything you want, Laila. I he says. I know this about you. And I also know that when this was is over, Afghanistan is going to need you.*" (378) Laila starts her life again with her father's new fangled ideas- a new Afghanistan women educating the kids at school. Her thoughts lingered with Mariam's love and affection which she had missed forever. But consoles herself feeling her presence in the trees they've planted, in the blankets that keep the children warm, in the pillows and books and pencils in the children's laughter. But Mariam is in Laila's own heart, where she shines with the bursting radiance of a thousand suns.

CONCLUSION

A Thousand Splendid Suns that grows as the novel unfolds into scenes of daily Afghan life and "genuinely heart-wrenching" moments. Hosseini deplors the impoverished condition of Afghans living in a war-torn country. Indeed, the two women's narrative points of view structure the novel with intricately wrought symmetry. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* the writer had aptly illustrated the travail of Afghani women- the growth of two girls into maturity, marriage, and maternity. Hosseini's two women are strategic contrasts physically, socially, and psychologically but attracted towards each other with humanitarian. The writer had spin out their fate with their sharp individual differences struggled with the commonalty among the Muslim women in Afghani society during 1970 to 2003. Both the characters undergo trauma and asserts oneself to dare, to initiative is to suffer pain, cause hurt to others, and precipitate tragedy.

They learn to bear and forbear. Hosseini thus prepares the psyche of this character for the almost incredible burden of abuse and suffering that both Mariam and Laila have to bear in their marriage. Hosseini's concatenation of the concluding action is as violent and bloody as that of a Renaissance revenge tragedy when the women are forced to rise up against their common oppressor. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, then, is indeed a splendid successor to *The Kite Runner*. His protagonists are flesh-and-blood women who are wrenchingly sympathetic with traditional culture, ill treated by patriarchal society and confinement. The plight of living on the front line of political, fundamentalist, and domestic terror that had distracted the life

of a young girl Laila and the traumas and sacrifice of many for the cause of the other. The outbreak of factional war, anarchy gave no loophole for the women to liberate themselves in and outside the house. Their suffocated life condition, humiliation, imprisonment and gender-based abuse had been brought into light by the writer through his characters like Nana, Mariam and Laila. The writers attempt to explore the inner dark lives of Afghani women through his fictional characters moves the humanitarian.

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