



HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE LITERARY WORK “THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS” BY KHALEED HOSSEINI

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Subject- Methods of Literary Analysis

Genesis of the Work

Afghan-American writer Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. His father was a diplomat in the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and history at a high school in Kabul. In 1976, the Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris. They were ready to return to Kabul in 1980, but by then their homeland had witnessed a bloody communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet Army. Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1988. The following year he entered the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, where he earned a medical degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai medical center in Los Angeles and was a practicing internist between 1996 and 2004.

In March 2001, while practicing medicine, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which was published by Riverhead Books in 2003. After *The Kite Runner*, *Thousand Splendid Suns* initially published in 2007, is set in Afghanistan from the early 1960s to the early 2000s. That debut went on to launch one of the biggest literary careers of our time. Today, Khaled Hosseini is one of the most recognized and bestselling authors in the world.

Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* tells the events of Afghan history from the Soviet invasion to the rule of the post-Taliban rebuilding. The novel depicts the saga of pains and struggles of the people of Afghanistan who have been suffering due to several invasions and wars.

The novel also describes the story of two women, Mariam and Laila, who face unbounded sufferings in their life and dare to hope for freedom. They challenge the traditional notion of gender role, redefine their human rights, excess the masculine power, and attain strength vigorous than the strength of thousand splendid suns. Characterizing them, Hosseini symbolically represents the political upheavals of Afghanistan and Afghan people's innate desire for independence. The story of the novel undeniably links the volatile events-the violence, horror, anticipation, and faith of the country in intimate terms; thus, the novel becomes an epic of the country. Using New-Historicism, this paper tries to focus on Khaled Hosseini's documentation of the





cultural, social, and political aspects of Afghan history in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to show it as a saga of war-torn Afghanistan.

Genre of the work

A Thousand Splendid Suns is actually classified as historical fiction and war literature. In stories with a historical fiction genre, some part of the story is true and the rest is not. The Soviet Union did invade Afghanistan. Taliban did invade Afghanistan. In regards to the historiography of gender politics in the Victorian era, the social position of women and femininity had become a problematic issue. Similarly, the gender apartheid instilled prior to the civil war in Afghanistan.

The story covers three decades of anti-Soviet jihad, civil war and Taliban tyranny seen from the perspectives of these two women and observes how they become to create a bond, despite having come from previously living in very different backgrounds.

The title of the work and its meaning

The story spans a length of time that starts in the 60s and ends in 2003 after the Afghan war as the displaced Afghans return from Pakistan. This particular piece of paper looks at the origin and essence of the title to the book, “*A Thousand Splendid Suns*” which originates from a poetic quote within the book. The title to the novel originates from the translation by Davis Josephine of the last line, in the fourth stanza of the poem titled “Kabul” by the Iranian Saib Tabrizi from the 17th century.

**“One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs,
Or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls.”**

The novel has gloom and doom that starts off with the death of Mariam’s mother through suicide. The tragic act is followed by non-caring act by her father Jalil who offers her for marriage to a man much older than her by far. The marriage gets abusive and she gets no immediate birth out of it. Its while in her abusive marriage that her life entangles with that of Laila-the co-wife to be that bears an illegitimate child like her out of her relation with Tariq. After the start of the war in Afghanistan, Laila’s parents die and she is taken in by Mariam and Tariq. She later becomes a co-wife and the two have to endure an abusive marriage under Rasheed. In the abusive marriage the two women become confidantes and comforters to one another. The two even plan to run away from their husband, but are unfortunately caught and severely punished. The title of the novel shows the real essence of the life behind the women’s survival. Despite the sadness and gloom in their life, the two are still able to shine with life and support towards one another, even as co-wives that are many at times expected to be





at loggerheads. The love and caring nature of the two is seen as at outstanding and distinct to the extent that Mariam responds to Rasheed's attack on Laila when she reunites with her old time lover Tariq. The response is however fatal and she ends up killing Rasheed with a shove. Her caring nature for Laila is finally seen when she confesses to the murder to draw attention away from Laila even when this meant death. The quote towards the end of the novel reinforces the essence of the title by stating that: "Miriam is in Laila's own heart, where she shines with the bursting radiance of a thousand suns... ." This quote refers to Mariam's continued existence in Laila's life even after death and thus signifying a brilliance in life greater than the sun and only equal to a thousand suns. The title thus signifies the brilliance of the characters, especially through their hard times, and according to the quote it may signify the brilliant nature that Mariam had and imparted on Laila as well as the positive memories that she left her.

There are also symbols which have special meaning. The *kolba* where Mariam lives with Nana is a shack made of mud and clay, not much better than a shelter for livestock. It is a symbol of how low Nana's status is as a woman, a maid, and a mother of a child out of wedlock. For Laila, it is also a symbol of Mariam's spirit. She goes to visit the *kolba* on her way to Kabul with Tariq. In the *kolba* Laila envisions Mariam as a spirited, joyful girl who loves life and makes the best of her surroundings. With the help of Mullah Faizullah and Jalil's visits, Mariam's childhood in the *kolba* indeed has bright spots. Mariam uses those moments of love and caring to keep herself happy and focused on the good her life has to offer. In this way the *kolba* symbolizes the duality of shameful deprivation and the love that Mariam is able to experience despite her circumstances.

The Burqa- is a symbol of control of a woman by a man, especially a wife by her husband. Rasheed tells Mariam that "a woman's face is her husband's business" and his business only, so she must wear a burqa in public. No one is allowed to see what Mariam looks like, although at funeral services, Laila does see Mariam's face. In those circumstances, Mariam is allowed to wear a headscarf, but in all other circumstances, she must wear the burqa.

There are levels of covering that observant Muslim women use, and the burqa is the strictest of coverings. Its only opening is a screen in front of the woman's eyes for the purpose of seeing. Both Mariam and Laila have trouble adjusting to the burqa because their range of vision is limited and they end up tripping on its hem. Rasheed tells Mariam that she may even grow to like the burqa, but he assumes that Mariam welcomes being invisible to the outside world. At first, the notion that she is protected by her husband appeals to Mariam. She welcomes the protection it seems to offer from





the outside world. However, the reality of Rasheed's low opinion and violent treatment of women erases any positive effects of the burqa, which also becomes a symbol of her isolation both as a woman and as a victim of abuse.

Who is the the Narrator

The story is told in the third person narrator who knows the past and the future and the characters' thoughts, alternating between Laila's and Mariam's point of view. He does not have a definite personality - he is not a specific person, who is telling this story for reasons that matter in a world outside of the story itself. He is merely a storyteller, telling the story for its own sake, creating characters and describing them to the reader for the reader's entertainment and education.

Hosseini breaks up the narrative in a way that focuses on each of the two main characters separately. The first section of the novel centers exclusively on Mariam, while the second and final sections are devoted to Laila. The third section weaves the narrative back-and-forth between the two women, emphasizing their growing friendship and alliance against Rasheed. The characters themselves provide a couple of points of view - Miriam and Laila are both children when they are introduced, and their growth and maturation, and the eventual intersection and interdependence of their lives takes the reader on a journey from childhood to maturity, from innocence and ignorance and powerlessness to action and guilt and consequences.

Conceptual level

The primary theme in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the rights of women, especially under the Taliban. Mariam and Laila grow up during regimes that are not oppressive. Although Mariam's father's family pushes her into marriage with Rasheed, it is ultimately her choice to agree to marry him. Under the Soviet regime, Laila is able to go to school, and her father wants her to hold off on marriage until she has finished her education. With the arrival of the Taliban, all of that is taken away. Women are expected to wear burqas, be escorted by male family members, and to be obedient to the rules and regulations of the regime. Laila and Mariam suffer at the hands of Rasheed because he is given all of the power over the women and children, according to the law. The unfair treatment of women is horrific and brutal, and epitomized with Mariam's execution in the stadium. Although there are other themes as,

True love-The theme of true love plays out in contrast to and alongside the disastrous results of arranged marriages. Laila's parents, Mammy (Fariba) and Babi (Hakim), have a true love-type marriage, and while they fight constantly through the early part





of Laila's life, they still speak fondly of how they met and fell in love. And they still love to tell Laila stories about their courtship. Life events cause stress in their relationship, not a lack of love for each other. Through these two characters, the author suggests that true love entails staying together and making decisions together, and true love does not include violence. Mammy and Babi don't decide to leave Kabul until they are both in agreement about the move, a decision that costs them their lives. The theme of true love plays out in contrast to and alongside the disastrous results of arranged marriages. Laila's parents, Mammy (Fariba) and Babi (Hakim), have a true love-type marriage, and while they fight constantly through the early part of Laila's life, they still speak fondly of how they met and fell in love. And they still love to tell Laila stories about their courtship. Life events cause stress in their relationship, not a lack of love for each other. Through these two characters, the author suggests that true love entails staying together and making decisions together, and true love does not include violence. Mammy and Babi don't decide to leave Kabul until they are both in agreement about the move, a decision that costs them their lives.

Another example of true love in the novel is Mariam's love for Aziza and Laila, which also extends to Zalmai when he is born. Mariam's storyline highlights the attribute of being willing to sacrifice for loved ones. Mariam is willing to give her life to save Laila, and she refuses to flee to safety with Laila because of her love for Zalmai. She is unwilling to put Zalmai through the experience of living with his father's killer. However, she loves Laila and Aziza too much to insist they stay. Their safety is more important to her than her own life. Mariam insists she has led a full life because she has been allowed to experience love for Laila and the children, the family she has always wanted. With this knowledge, she is able to meet the end of her life in peace, despite her fear of death.

Shame- which is integrally connected to social status in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, runs through nearly all of the main characters' motivations and actions, and its effects are often exponential. The low status of a *harami*, a person born out of wedlock, as well as the woman who gives birth to that child, keeps Nana and Mariam isolated. Nana accepts her status, though she is angry that Jalil has pushed her and his daughter out of his home. She tries to make Mariam accept that her life will always be a misery at the hands of a man, who will blame her for all of his unhappiness, and she tries to save Mariam from that fate by keeping her at home. When Mariam rebels and goes to find Jalil, Nana is overcome with sadness and shame, unable to continue living if she has to do it alone. Mariam is also overcome with shame when she realizes that Jalil will not accept her into his home, but she doesn't let that shame keep her loyal to Jalil, whose shame also makes him arrange her marriage with Rasheed.





The novel narrates some problems about the strength and resilience of two women who endure physical and psychological cruelty in an anti-feminist society. It also demonstrates how The Taliban uses fear and violence to control the people of Afghanistan, particularly females. Throughout this story the novel exposes the way customs and laws endorse Rasheed's violent misogyny and it tells the tale of two women who endure a marriage to a ruthless and brutal man, whose behaviour forces them to kill him. The protagonist Mariam is a poor villager who lives in a remote area in Afghanistan, in contrast to Laila who is a smart, educated daughter of a schoolteacher. Khaled Hosseini has an interesting way of portraying the two female protagonists. He discloses the tyranny and hostility that the Taliban enforce on women just because of their sex. A critic viewed the novel as 'a powerful portrait of female suffering' making the reader explicitly aware of the harsh environment Mariam and Laila had to tolerate. One review expressed that 'Hosseini defends the rights of women to decide what to be in life', this could show that Hosseini directed the novel to be in favour of feminist views.

The Plot

The novel is divided into four parts. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the conflict in Afghanistan through the lens of the country's oppressed women. Yet, the novel actually breaks western stereotypes of Afghanistan by highlighting acts of resistance and bravery among its female characters.

A Thousand Splendid Suns paints a vivid portrait of Afghanistan through the lives of Afghan women, who despite starkly different backgrounds. The main domestic conflict within the novel is between Mariam and her husband Rasheed. At first, it seems like Mariam is completely submissive and helpless to her circumstances as she does not lift a finger or protest as she is beaten, slapped and punched, But Mariam's constant hope of a better life is evidence that she has not given up, and is not the stereotypical submissive wife that the reader may be imagining. Despite being constantly abused, and betrayed, Mariam never gives up on the hope that she will find a family. As a child, Mariam is verbally abused by her mother, but she finds solace in her father, Jalil's, weekly visits. Mariam trusts her father more than anyone, until Jalil betrays Mariam by selling her off to Rasheed in marriage. Yet, Mariam remains hopeful that Rasheed will be kind, as "in the early days of her marriage she quickly responds to the attention and praise Rasheed gives her, for 'It surprised her, this thrill she felt over his small compliment". Mariam assumes that Rasheed's gun is for her own safety, though ironically, he will hold the gun to her face just weeks later.





MAN vs. MAN-After Tariq hears that neighborhood bully Khadim had sprayed Laila with urine from a water gun to mock her “yellow hair”, he attacks Khadim with his prosthetic leg. After the fight, Khadim never bothers Laila again.

MAN vs. SELF-Laila wakes up after her parents are killed by a rocket that hit their house, finding that she has been saved and taken care of by Rasheed. She also knows that she is pregnant with Tariq’s child, and that as an unwed mother, she will be in danger. Despite Mariam’s objections and obvious anger at the threat she feels Laila poses, Laila agrees to marry Rasheed to protect herself and her baby.

MAN vs. SOCIETY-Laila and Mariam try to escape on a bus to Peshawar with Aziza. However, they cannot board the bus without a male family member, so they enlist the help of someone they deem to be a friendly man. He turns them in to the authorities, who send them back to Rasheed. It is a crime for a woman to run away from her husband, according to the Taliban.

System of characters of the work

Mariam is protagonist one of the main positive character of the work. She is an intelligent but uneducated girl whose father refuses to house her after her mother, his estranged lover, dies. Instead, he marries her off to Rasheed. She has several miscarriages and is severely abused, but she befriends Laila, Rasheed's second wife. Mariam saves Laila's life by killing Rasheed and is executed for her crime. She is also would be considered a dynamic character because she was easily manipulated and never really stood up for herself. Throughout the story she does what anyone tells her to do.

Laila is also a positive character. She is young Tajik girl with blond hair and green eyes who is in love with her childhood friend, Tariq. After Tariq's family leaves Kabul because of rocket attacks and Laila narrowly survives an attack that kills her parents, she is taken in by Mariam and Rasheed. Eventually Laila, who is told Tariq is dead, becomes Rasheed's second wife but only because she is already pregnant with Tariq's baby and the marriage will enable her to protect her child. _

Rasheed is (static) a secondary negative character. He is considered a static character because he remained a horrific person throughout. He is cold blooded ,brutal and merciless Pashtun shoemaker in Kabul who arranges with Jalil, Mariam's father, to marry Mariam, so Jalil doesn't have to house his daughter, who was born out of wedlock, which is a source of shame for Jalil. Rasheed believes in strict Islamic treatment of women, forcing Mariam to wear a burqa in public. He becomes violent and abusive when she fails to provide him with a child. He later also marries Laila, a 14-year-old girl he pulls out of the rubble after a bomb destroys her house and kills



her parents. Suspecting that Laila lied to him and was already pregnant at the time of their marriage, Rasheed becomes even more violent and abusive. When Laila's true love, Tariq, who was presumed dead, returns, Rasheed flies into a rage and nearly kills Laila. However, Rasheed's other wife, Mariam, kills him with a shovel and saves Laila's life.

Tariq is secondary positive character. He is a handsome Pashtun boy who has lost a leg because of a land mine, is Laila's best childhood friend. He becomes her lover but soon after leaves Kabul for Pakistan with his family to avoid war. He eventually comes back to find Laila, discovering that he has fathered a daughter with her. When Mariam kills Rasheed, Tariq helps Laila and the children escape Kabul. He marries Laila, and, together, they raise their child and the son Laila had with Rasheed. Eventually, they return to Kabul, where they renovate the orphanage Tariq's daughter had been left at during the war.

Composition

The characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini are fictional. But the story of the life of Laila and Mariam is too heart breaking and I felt sad for the whole day while reading this. Makes me grateful for the life I am living but saddens me when I think of there are many people out there who still have tragic lives similar to Mariam and Laila.

The ending or epilogue of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was most indeed unforgettable. The ending was personally my favourite part of the novel. The four points I will elaborate on is the character I admired during the denouement, the plot of the epilogue, the setting of the postlude, and lastly the theme I have learnt in this novel. The character I admired at the ending of the novel, was an obvious hero: Mariam. Mariam throughout the novel has been the true definition of 'woman endurance', rejected as a child...How will she look at him in the future? She says, "For me it ends here. There's nothing more I want. Everything I'd ever wished for as a little girl you've already given me. You and your children have made me so very happy. It's all right, Laila jo. This is all right. Don't be sad- is a quote that supports my admiration of her bravery. Who would have known an illegitimate child who was denied the basic rights of a human, took the ultimate sacrifice in accepting her death rather than point and accuse Laila. She, in general, can be found in any mother, the quality of undefined love that we all, at some point have taken for granted. The ending of the novel is basically the ending of part 3 and the whole of part 4. It begins with the trial that found mariam guilty for the murder of Rasheed. The first thing you notice about part 4 is that the tense is now in present tense, as if to create a feeling that they had a fresh start. The ending



is that Laila and Tariq are now happily married and they are settling down in Murree. Comparing to the other three parts of the novel, the pace of the epilogue is both subtle and easy going. Each member of their little family is doing well, Laila teaching at the orphanage, Tariq being able to find work and the children attending school was a nice ending. The best part of the ending was that Laila was pregnant.

Language and style

The writing style of Khaled Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is both sympathetic and disgusted. He feels pity on those that bear the burden of the war. He shows this mostly through the use of two major literary devices: Symbolism and Imagery. These two literary devices impact the reader because it gives a deeper insight and understanding of the pain and fear these characters were forced into dealing with every day.

An example of how Hosseini feels disgusted and sympathetic is when one of the main characters, Mariam Jo, is forced to go live with her father after her mother's untimely death on page 36, "suddenly he was standing in front of her, trying to cover her eyes, pushing her back the way they had come saying 'Go back! No. Don't... Her own band was a little tight, but he had no trouble forcing it over her knuckles". The symbolism in this quote is with the description of the size of the bands and the force Rasheed used to force the band over her knuckles. Due to the fact that the bands were "thin" is a portrayal of the future marriage to come. The force Rasheed uses to put the gold band on her finger is an indication of the hidden persona that lies dormant beneath the weight of his current desire. The disgust of the forced marriage is portrayed through the physical description of Rasheed.

The third example is on page 104 after Mariam has had multiple miscarriages and has yet to provide Rasheed with a male heir. "CHEW!' He bellowed. A gust of smoky breath slammed against her face. Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked. 'Good.' Rasheed said. His cheeks were quivering. 'Now you know what your rice tastes like. Now you know what you've given me in this marriage. Bad food and nothing else.' Then he was gone, leaving Mariam to spit out pebbles, blood and the fragments of two broken molars". Hosseini's symbolism in this passage is in the location of the teeth and the blood spit out. The fact that the teeth were in the front indicated and hidden emotional pain that she will then learn to hide easily. The blood is just a representation of the physical pain to come. Reading this imagery makes us very sympathetic for Mariam and was gain a great disliking of Rasheed.



Literature

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