

ISSN: 2278-9529



GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

July 2015 Vol. 4. Issue IV

www.galaxyimrj.com

Editor-In-Chief- Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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Love as the Key Theme in Khaled Hosseini's Novels

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Love is the key theme in Khaled Hosseini's novels. Different shades of love are depicted by Hosseini in all his three novels. For example Hosseini's first novel *The Kite Runner* is a twisted tale of friendship between two boys Amir and Hassan. His second novel *A Thousand Splendid Sun* depicts the love and friendship of two women of different upbringing and age through the characters of Mariam and Laila. The third book *And The Mountain Echoed* is the story of two sibling Pari and Abdullah and their lifelong separation. Set against the backdrop of political unrest Hosseini portrays the power of love which helps the characters in his novels to survive, to help and to construct the future of post-war Afghanistan. It is their longing for love that draws characters out of their isolation, gives them power to go beyond their limitations, to struggle with their vulnerabilities and perform the act of self-sacrifice.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-born American novelist. He is a widely acclaimed for all his three novels have become bestsellers. Hosseini recalls in each of his novels about the city where he was born, spent his childhood and observes that "Kabul was not the same always." Kabul as the capital of Afghanistan once had the pride of magnificent historical monuments, art, architecture, gardens and mouth-watering delicacies. Against the backdrop of political upheavals with Afghanistan slowly falling into the tyrant hands of the Soviet Union, Mujahidin's and Taliban's, the strong factor that gives strength to the characters is the bond of love and loyalty as reflected in 'The Kite Runner', 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' and 'And The Mountain Echoed'. Hosseini depicts love as the main theme in his novels. Different shades of love are portrayed carefully in all his three novels – love between two friends Amir and Hassan, love between two women which can be seen as the love of mother and daughter through the characters of Mariam and Laila in, lastly the love between the brother and sister Pari and Abdullah. Their love is tried and tested amidst difficult conditions and the characters are left to discover their longing for love that draws them out of their isolation, gives them strength to transcend their limitation, to struggle with their vulnerabilities and perform acts of self-sacrifice.

Hosseini's first book *The Kite Runner* (2003) is a twisted tale of friendship. The story is set against a back drop of tumultuous events, from the fall of Afghanistan's monarchy through the Soviet military Intervention, the exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the rise of Taliban's regime. Against this backdrop, the relationship of Amir and Hassan are portrayed which is one of intense friendship and loyalty. Amir, a well-to-do Pashtun boy, and Hassan, a Hazara who is the son of Ali, Amir's father's servant, spend their days kite fighting in the hitherto peaceful city of Kabul. Amir recalls that "I spent most of the first twelve years of my life playing with Hassan. Sometimes, my entire childhood seems like one long lazy summer day with Hassan, chasing each other with tangles of trees in my father's yard, playing hide-and-seek, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians..." Hassan plays and reads out stories to him and extremely loyal intently following orders as a servant. One triumphant day, Amir wins

the local kite fighting tournament. Hassan runs for the retrieval of the last cut kite, a great trophy, saying to Amir, "For you, a thousand times over." Amir is fond of Hassan but envies his father's affection and admiration for Hassan. The antagonist of the novel, Assef, pokes fun of Amir for calling Hassan as his friend as he is a Hazara. According to Assef "Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns," and "It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the Pure Afghans, not this Flat Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our watan. They dirty our bloods." Amir nearly retorts by blurting out "he's not my friend! He's my servant!" but holds his tongue instead. On the other hand, as a loyal follower Hassan was ready to do anything for his master. So when Amir asks Hassan whether he can eat dirt for his friend to which Hassan says "if you asked I would." He defends Amir from neighbourhood boys' taunting him by taking a slingshot aimed at one of them for being rude to Amir. As Amir's kite soars in the clear sky Hassan runs to catch the last snapped kite for his master. On the way back after retrieving the kite he is caught and raped by the same impish boys whose gang-leader is Aseef. When Amir accidentally witnesses the whole scene he does not save Hassan in fear of losing the winning kite. After that incident Amir maintains a distance from Hassan. He also fears that if his father comes to know about his cowardice behavior, his affection for him would come to an end. From then there develops a sense of guilt in Amir, a lifelong guilt. He even cannot stand living with Hassan. He accuses him of false theft. On the next day of his birthday, Amir hides some of his birthday gifts under Hassan's bed and falsely blames Hassan that he stole his things. To Amir's surprise, Hassan admits the guilt that he has not committed. The next day Ali and Hassan leave for ever. Hassan is a Christ-like figure that only knows how to give love and doesn't expect anything in return. Soon after a political upheaval follow for which Baba Jan and Hassan are forced to take refuge in the United States. But the guilt remains passive in his conscience. Years later, after his father's death, he receives a call from Afghanistan which urges him to go back to Kabul as there is still a chance for him to "be good again." He gradually came to know that Hassan is his half-brother and both he and his wife got killed by the Talibans leaving their son Sohrab behind. Amir is determined to save Sohrab from the clutches of Talibans who are sexually abusing the boy. He endures extreme physical violence as a symbol of repentance in the process of saving Sohrab. Coincidentally Sohrab's deftness at the slingshot frees Amir from the tormentors in the same manner as previously Hassan had rescued Amir. However he saves Sohrab from the Talibans and adopts him as his son and becomes the symbol of his retribution. "For you a thousand times over" as what Hassan had said to Amir and towards the end of the novel now it is Amir who runs after a kite sayings: "For you a thousand times over." Sohrab becomes the bridge of love and friendship between Amir and Hassan.

Khaled Hosseini's second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) depicts the love and friendship between two women of different upbringing age. The story of their lives runs parallel to the history of Afghanistan as the novel stretches over four decades. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is divided into four parts. Part One tells the story of Mariam who lives in a Kolba on the outskirts of Herat with her embittered mother. Mariam is Jalil's illegitimate daughter and she is prohibited to live with Jalil and his family in the town. Jalil visits her every Thursday. His story of the movie Pinocchio lures her to visit

the town at his father's house. But she is barred at the gate and ends up sleeping on the street. In the morning, Mariam returns to find her mother has committed suicide out of fear of losing her daughter. Mariam is then taken to her father's house and is forced to be married to Rasheed who is thirty years senior. In Kabul Mariam lives with Rasheed and becomes pregnant seven successive times though is unable to carry a child to term. Ultimately Rasheed grows more despondent over his wife's inability to have a child and particularly a son. Part two portrays the story of Laila who grows up in Kabul. Laila is a close friend of Tariq and there develops a relationship of romantic love between the two. Tariq's family decides to leave the town and the emotional farewell between them culminates with them making love. Laila family is also ready to leave Kabul when a rocket kills her parents. Laila is subsequently sheltered by Rasheed. After her recovery she discovers that she is pregnant with Tariq's baby and agrees to Rasheed's proposal of marriage finding that Tariq has already died. After the birth of a daughter, Rasheed grows displeased and suspicious. From then, there develops a relationship of love and friendship between Laila and Mariam and from here part three begins. The two women become confidants and plans to run away though finally are caught and brought back by the Talibans in Rasheed's house. After beating them Rasheed confines Laila and Aziza in a room and deprives them of water for several days, almost killing Aziza.

A few years later, Laila gives birth to Rasheed's son, Zalmai. He is attached closely to Rasheed. Then one day Tariq appears outside the house, and he and Laila are reunited. After coming home Rasheed comes to know all about Tariq from his son Zalmai. He is about to kill Laila. At this crucial juncture, Mariam, who has done all she can to appease and accommodate Rasheed, who has lived in fear throughout her marriage, is able to resist not only his brutal force but her revulsion of violent action to save Laila. "He's going to kill her... he really means to. And Mariam could not... allow that to happen. He'd taken so much from her... she would not watch him take Laila too" (Hosseini 310). In these remaining seconds, she remains clearheaded enough to assure her results. "Mariam raised the shovel high... she turned it so the sharp edge vertical, and, as she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time that she was deciding the course of her life" (Hosseini 311).

She has chosen death so that Laila and the children, together with Tariq, can find a sanctuary where they will thrive in peace and security. Thoughts of her loved ones are in her mind as Mariam is close to her death. She is at peace with her actions and is aware that though she comes into the world unwanted, she leaves it "as a woman who had loved and been loved back... this was a legitimate end of a life of illegitimate beginnings" (Hosseini 320) Mariam is publicly executed allowing Laila and Tariq to leave for Pakistan with Aziza and Zalmai.

The fourth part is the happy life of Laila and Tariq together in Murree in Pakistan. After the fall of Talibans, Laila and Tariq return to Kabul by way of Herat. While there, Laila visits Gul Daman and her Kolba outside the village. In Laila's eye, the abandoned remains of Mariam's and her mother's small hut are set in a peaceful and bucolic corner of Afghanistan. Her mind is filled with Mariam's stories and imagines her playing on

the Kolba floor as a small child. Mariam's sacrifice is infused into Laila's purpose and the reconstruction of Kabul. Laila realizes that Mariam not only chose his fate but chose it for Laila's well-being gives Laila a sense of purpose and allows her to grow beyond the tragedies she experiences and to choose to devote her life to others and to something as seemingly impossible as the reconstruction of Kabul and Afghanistan.

And the Mountain Echoed (2013) is his third novel which depicts the story of two sibling Pari and Abdullah – their attachment and life-long separation. The story revolves around the brother and sister Abdullah and Pari who live in a poverty-stricken house along with their step-mother Parwana and a new born half-brother. And the family finds itself at a critical point. They lost a baby to the winter the year before, and the winter is around the corner again, and the family is desperate to survive the winter, and they are about to make a decision that is going to change the lives of these two character, Abdullah and Pari. Abdullah is more like a mother to the little girl than a brother. Their father Saboor decides to sell Pari to a childless rich couple living in the city of Kabul. The ten year old Abdullah has a slight inkling of his father's intention but is too immature to stand up against him. Separated from her brother at the age of three years, it is still easier for Pari to forget her past but for Abdullah the pain lasts forever till his memory is white washed due to an illness in his old age. Pari left Afghanistan, resides in Paris, marries her lover and has several children but still something about the past haunts her, when she is into fifties only then the truth about her biological parents is disclosed. Finally Pari after much search is able to reunite with Abdullah in California. However, he is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and is unable to remember her.

The struggle and oppression in the lives of Afghan people are portrayed in the novels of Khaled Hosseini. Set against the backdrop of political unrest Hosseini depicts the power of love which helps the characters to survive, to help and to construct the future of post war Afghanistan. All the novels are filled with the joyful spirit of typical Afghan family whether in its motherland or in diaspora. In his interview Hosseini states that in his novels: "it is ultimately love that draws characters out of their isolation, that gives them the strength to transcend their own limitations, to expose their vulnerabilities, and to perform devastating acts of self-sacrifice".

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