

Mismatching relationships in the novel , A Thousand Splendid Suns

Farhad Ahmad Pir¹,

Research scholar,

Barkatullah University, Bhopal (M.P).

Kranti Vats²

Associate Professor,

Govt. M.V.M College, Bhopal (M.P)

The Afghan born American writer, Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan on March 4th, 1965. He is a Physician by profession and novelist by choice. As an American citizen, he has lived in United States since he was fifteen years old. His father was a diplomat for Afghanistan's foreign ministry and his mother taught Farsi and history at a girl's high school in Kabul. His family moved to Tehran in 1970 and returned back in 1973. In 1976, Hosseini's father obtained a job in Paris, France and moved the family there. They were to return home to Afghanistan in 1980, when the Russians invaded his country. Instead of returning they sought political asylum in the United States and they moved to San Jose, California, in September 1980.

Hosseini is currently a Goodwill Envoy for the United Nations High commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which provides assistance to more than twenty million displaced people around the world. He has further created the Khaled Hosseini foundation, to provide shelter, healthcare, education and economic opportunity for Afghan people. Hosseini devotion to Afghanistan can be seen not only in his writing but also in his activism.

Khaled Hosseini first debut novel, *The Kite Runner* is published in 2003 that quickly became an international bestseller, selling more than 12 million copies worldwide and published in 48 countries. *The Kite Runner* is the first novel written in English by an Afghan in America creating space for emerging novelists of the Afghan Diaspora who want to contribute to world literature. Khaled Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was written after Hosseini travelled back to his native Afghanistan after 27 years in 2003, to examine the nations' situation in the aftermath of decades of turmoil since Russian Invasion in 1979. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released on May 22, 2007 that is presently published in 40 countries. In 2008, the book was the bestselling novel in UK (as of April 11, 2008), with more than 700,000 copies sold. Through both of his blockbuster novels, *The Kite Runner* and the *Thousand Splendid Suns* have sold more than 38 million copies worldwide, these novels are yet to be published in Afghanistan. Hosseini's third novel *And the Mountains Echoed* was published on May 21, 2013 and was anticipated as another strong success, reaching the top 10 on Amazon.com before its release and later becoming a bestseller. It was reported that three million copies had been sold only after the publication of five months.

Khaled Hosseini is a gifted storyteller with remarkable art of storytelling. His first novel, *The Kite Runner* was a male dominated story, *A Thousand splendid Suns* is a story of mother-daughter relationship. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a challenging work with intertwined rich and violent history of Afghanistan. Hosseini places his story against the backdrop of Afghanistan's 30 year tribulation, the Soviet invasion, the emergence of Taliban. Hosseini is doing the same for Afghanistan what Conrad had done for Africa:

Khaled Hosseini is arguably one of the best storytellers in English since the British writer Joseph Conrad. He has the capacious heart and soul of an optimist, the eye of a realist. He is not ashamed to know and show compassion. (Buffalo News)

Marriage or matrimony is a socially recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them, their children and their in-laws. Marriage is a union of two souls and takes place on the approval of both sides' (from both the families). In marriage the thinking, attitudes, mindsets and behavioral patterns cannot be expected to be similar or exactly matching. The understanding, resulting in compatibility in marriage, can thus develop only gradually. It brings stability and essence to human relations, which is incomplete without marriage. Its strongest function concerns with the care of children, their upbringing and education. But unfortunately, marriages have become a taboo due to baseless customs, like dowry, caste system, wealth, fame etc. If we look at social cultural outlook in Khaled Hosseini's novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it presents a different scenario in front of our eyes, surpassing all these heinous customs. Here the relationships are based on male dominance, male chauvinism, lust for female body, disliking of female child and just distortion of Islamic Sharia.

In the novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Hosseini shows us how female characters become the sex objects in the cruel hands of patriarchal society, in which male could do anything to satisfy his animal desires, whether legally and out of wedlock. A male member in this novel makes every type of strategy to trap the female body in order to fulfill his demands, despite the reluctance on the female side, but circumstances put them in such a hard situations, where they are unable to make decisions for themselves. In spite of dire circumstances they accept their ill fate of unsound relationship and stand to face harsh circumstances bravely.

Hosseini denounces Taliban for polygamy (keeping more than one wives) and considers it the male oppression against woman. But in reality the people in Afghanistan are all Muslims. Islam allows man to have four wives at a time given a condition to satisfy their needs sexually and economically. As in the novel we see Jalil has three wives in legally, still he has an illicit relationship with Nana, a housekeeper. Similarly, Rashid traps Laila in wedlock to gratify his sexual needs, while having Mariam as his wife. In legitimizing the relationship with Laila, Rashid tells Miriam,

Don't be so dramatic. Its common thing and you know it. I have friends who have two, three, four wives. Your own father had three. Besides what I am doing now most men I know would have done long ago. You know it's true. (P-133)

Islam allows Rasheed to have another wife legally, but not to ill-treat Mariam, not to trap Laila in marriage. Hosseini shows through his characters, how they spoil one another intentionally and having in such complex conditions, where they are unable to speak the truth. Jalil the father of Miriam had already three wives and nine children.

He was one of Heart's best connected men, friend of mayor and the provincial governor. He had a cook, a driver, and three house keepers. Nana had been on of the housekeepers. Until her belly began to swell. (P-1)

Nana was one of the house keepers, who became Jalil's sex object. When Nana got pregnant, she was forcibly thrown out of the house on the insistence of Jalil's wives, never to be seen again. Jalil behaved like a dumb, could not defend Nana. Due to his silence only Nana suffered, because she was female and nobody could speak on her behalf. Jalil himself was equally responsible for this sinful act, but he saved his nose, due to his masculinity. She was thrown out of the house to live in a rat-hole, *kolba*. Nana's words always torching her mind throughout life, accepting that Nana had spoken the truth. Nana admonishes her daughter learn:

Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds at woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam" (p-7)

But Mariam was flattered by Jalil's words, she later she found the truth but till that time Nana had no other option that to hang herself and let Mariam stand on her own. Mariam questions herself. Where does she belong, what was going to do.? After spending some nights in Jalil's mansion, Jalil and his wives wanted this ugly stain washed. They agreed to marry her with Rasheed, who was twenty years older than Mariam without considering her wish. Mariam was asked about the bridegroom, whose name is Rashid, he's friend of a business acquaintance of her father's. He is a shoemaker. Mariam became dumb as she had now nowhere to go and none was there to share her grief with. She wanted Jalil to stop his wives, "*Mariam fixed her eyes on Jalil, her heart somersaulting in her chest, is this true*" (p-8)

Jalil, whom Nana rightly called, a coward, having no *Dil* (heart) reacted the same way as he had done before with Nana. Danced on the music of his wives, again like a rattle in the hands of his wives without interfering of, what Mariam wants. Mariam expectedly looked at Jalil with helpless eyes. "*Jalil wouldn't look at her. He went on chewing the corner of his lower lip and staring at the pitch.*" (P-8)

Jalil accepted their decision, and committed sin after sin. First destroyed Nana, now was Mariam with the stupidity of coward and remaining puppet in the hands of his wives. Jalil's wives without caring for Mariam's age, in spite of that were showing sympathies with Rashid and made every possible effort to persuade Mariam to accept him. Mariam felt helpless, waiting Jalil to speak, but Jalil remained silent without saying a single word. Instead of that one of the wives says,

You can't spend the rest of your life here. Don't you want a family of your own? "Actually, your father has already given Rasheed his answer", Afsoon said. 'Rasheed is here, in Herat; he has come all the way from Kabul. The nikka will be tomorrow morning, and then there is a bus leaving for Kabul at noon.

Mariam after losing hope knew that there is no one who can stand for her. She made herself to accept Rashid and leave for Kabul at short duration of time, next day. Mariam's marriage was only to send her out of the house because she was the walking and breathing embodiment of their shame. Thus, the marriage or so called the symbiosis between Rasheed and Mariam, is possibly the central conflict in this story, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

When she reached Rashid's house, she felt herself estranged. Rashid, who was a different breed of man, imposed strict rules on her. Mariam trying to keep strong knot with Rashid in every way without losing him, because there was no one left for her. He made Mariam's life hell, without knowing the true meaning of Husband-wife relationship. He threatens her many times due to some menial things like cooking and even did a rough coupling at night almost leaving her to wait to bear the pain down below. First being reluctant to accept this marriage proposal after that she hopelessly accepted Rashid, who was not worthy for her and made her life more miserable. There

was not a single sign of love in Rashid's heart for Mariam. Since four years of her married life, she has learned how to tolerate his mood changes, because she is afraid.

On occasion, he would resolve with punches, slaps, kicks, and sometimes try to make amends for with polluted apologies and sometimes not. (p-98)

He was always trying to find a way to scold her. One day there was some minor fault in the rice, that day he showered on her saying. *"He snatched her hand, opened it, and dropped a handful of pebbles into it. Put these in your mouth.* (P-102) Rasheed forcefully clasped her jaw, opened her mouth, kept it open, and then strongly forced the cold, hard pebbles into her mouth.

"Now chew... Through the mouthful of grit and pebbles, Mariam mumbled a plea. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes. (P-103)

Mariam had seven miscarriages and she was thinking that these miscarriages are the punishment for not hearing her mother. The only that consoled her was the verses of holy Quran. Even Rasheed even disdained her for miscarriage of child. On Mariam's first pregnancy, Rasheed warned her, against the birth of girl child. On the bus ride home from the doctor, what Rashid promptly asked her?

What about Zalmai?" he said "it is a good Pashtu name."

"What if it's a girl?" Mariam said.

"I think it's a boy. Yes. A boy."

"If it's a girl." Rasheed said, "and it isn't, but,

If it's a girl, then you can choose whatever name you want." (P-86)

When Mariam turned old, Rasheed was twenty years older to her, still he trapped Laila in marriage with him. The conflict between Mariam and her authoritative husband is getting more complicated when Rasheed married Laila, only fourteen years girl. Laila also became the victim of Rasheed's lust. Right from her childhood, she loved Tariq. Laila is an ethnic Tajik, daughter of Hakim and Fariba. She is a beautiful and intelligent educated girl, unlike Mariam. Laila's father is a university educated and a teacher, who wanted Laila to be educated and to serve the Nation. He was a liberal minded and valued women education as equal to men. There is a contrast between urban and rural life, educated and uneducated family. Mariam who belonged to a rural life and uneducated ancestry, was asked not to think of education. Nana had forcibly told her that women like them only need thalamus (endurance). On the other hand, Laila's father helped her with home work and helped her to get the first position in the class. He is a man who considers women education as necessary as equal to men. He says,

"Even though the communists had invaded and destroyed their country only one thing they did right is, in the field of education of women. It's a good time to be a woman in Afghanistan." (p-133)

Laila was beautiful and younger as compared to Mariam. She was very close to Tariq and found it very difficult to live in the absence of his love. The relationship between Tariq and Laila was very good. After Tariq left Kabul, finding a secure place in Peshawar, all hopes dashed after the blast hitting Laila's home. There was only smoke flowing in the air; Laila's loving parents also became the victim of the blast, leaving Laila in the cruel hands of the society. Tariq was not there and she was orphaned. From here, Rashid a tricky man endowed with animal desires turned his devilish mind to trap Laila now. Laila was very young only fourteen years old and he got attracted towards her physical charms. Notwithstanding of helping her for the sake of God, he became so sympathetic to Laila and took extreme steps to trap Laila and made plan to marry her.

Knowing that she was pregnant, and somebody named Abdul Sharif informed that Tariq was dead, Laila accepted the marriage with Rasheed, to offer Tariq's child fatherhood, making Mariam's existence more meaningless in Rasheed's eyes to the extent that he calls her a 'dehati' and a 'harami' and compares her to a trusty Volga automobiles and, Rasheed said to the girl, "You, on the other hand would be a Benz. A brand-new, first-class, shiny Benz... As for you, you are the queen, the malika, and this house is your palace. Anything you need done you ask Mariam and she will do it for you." (p-216) And that Mariam was just as Rasheed's eyes and ears of Laila's act instead of his wife. "I should say that Mariam will be my eyes and ears when I'm away." (P.218) Mariam thought that Laila stole her husband so that she didn't talk to her in friendly way, "I wouldn't have fed you and washed you and nursed you if I'd known you were going to turn around and steal my husband." (p-219) But Mariam's jealousy to Laila, little by little subsided with the birth of Aziza and the fact that Mariam and Laila were now equally ill-treated. Mariam felt that she pitied Aziza the baby-girl, "Look at you. What a sorry sight you are, dressed like a damn boy. And all bundled up in this heat. No wonder you're still awake." (P.218)

After the friendship between Mariam and Laila, Mariam grew accustomed to the existence of Laila and Aziza. They now became a companion and faced Rasheed the authoritative husband together. In order to escape from the miserable life with Rasheed, Laila planned migrate to Afghanistan and requested Mariam to accompany her and Aziza, *We're leaving this spring, Aziza and I. Come with us Mariam.* (P.229)

The story is getting heightened and more complicated when Tariq appeared again after ten years. And Zalmi, son of Laila and Rasheed, told his father about it, "I was upstairs, playing with Mariam," Zalmi said. "And your mother?" "She was... She was downstairs, talking to that man." "I see," said Rasheed. "Teamwork." (P.307) And then after taking Zalmi upstairs, he grabbed Laila's neck and Mariam tried to help, but couldn't stop Rasheed and Rasheed was resolved to kill Laila. But this time Rasheed was not successful in his heinous crimes, because Laila and Mariam (two women from widely different backgrounds joined hands together. Then Mariam swung a shovel, "Mariam steadied her feet and tightened up her grip around the shovel's hand. She raised it... Mariam swung." (P.310) and Rasheed was killed and "This was the first time that she (Mariam) was deciding the course of her own life.(p-341)

Rasheed's murder resolved the conflict in the story and gave freedom to Laila and Aziza, but Mariam turned herself to the Taliban. She was sentenced to death for Rasheed's murder. Laila, Tariq, Aziza and Zalmi fled to Murree, Pakistan and get married the next day.

Conclusion

In the novel, *A Thousand splendid Suns* we saw many relationships like, Jalil and Nana, Jalil and his three wives, Rasheed and Mariam, Rasheed and Laila, Tariq and Laila. In these relationships we can see many mismatching relationships that could not withstand for longer, only two selfless love relationships survived, though after hardships. Nana and Jalil's relationship was a sex driven and later Nana suffered, and hanged herself, but Jalil repents for the loss at the end. When Tariq and Laila moved to Kabul where Hamza, Mullah Faizullah's son gave her the box from Jalil which contained a Film, a letter for Mariam and Mariam's share of inheritance from her father.

Mariam married Rasheed to escape from miserable life in Jalil's house, but her fate put her in more harder life with Rasheed. There was not a single sign of love in Rashid's heart for Mariam. Mariam was blamed for this and that only for the reason she was a woman and as an illegitimate person. Thus, their relationship was a symbiosis between them rather than a marriage.

Laila married Rasheed only to give name to offer Tariq's child, fatherhood. Aziza was a sign of love, respect and relationship between Laila and Tariq out of wedlock. There was no bond between Laila and Rasheed, it was further deteriorated with Tariq's arrival after ten years.

Only two relationships were successful and ideal that withstood the devastations of time. Hakim and Fariba were a good couple and the good parents, but a slight flaw was Fariba was more attached to her sons, Ahmad and Noor. Tariq and Laila's relationship was good and they could recognize and acknowledge their love, after ten years of absence, because this relationship was not, in any case a mismatch. Mariam was always in Laila's heart and she intended to name her girl child, Mariam.

Reference

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 36 Soho Square, London. 2007.