

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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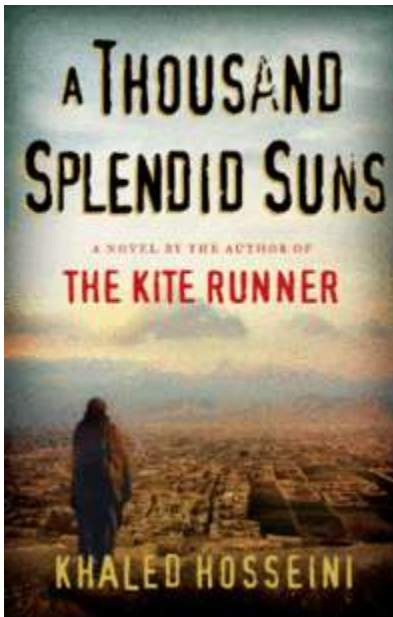
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A Thousand Splendid Suns of Khaled Hosseini

Selvi Bunce



A Heart-wrenching Novel about Two Women

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a heart wrenching novel that takes place in Afghanistan from the time period of the Soviet Occupation, in 1959, until 2002 when the US enters the country.

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This book really opened my eyes about the impact of the war and how it affected everyone, not just the soldiers.

The Story of Miriam

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a novel about two women in Afghanistan. The book starts out with the childhood of one woman, Miriam. She is the illegitimate child of her rich and well to do father Jalil. She lives with her mother in a hut separated from society. Jalil visits Miriam once a week and is extremely kind towards her. This makes Miriam love him very much, even though her mother warns that Jalil will break his promises and will break Miriam's heart.

For Miriam's birthday, Jalil promises to take her to the movies but Miriam's mother does not approve. So, when Jalil does not show up Miriam goes to town to look for him, only to come back home to find her mother hanging from a willow tree, dead. Since Jalil is Miriam's only remaining family she goes to live with him. Jalil claims that Miriam is a "burden" to his household and marries her off to a man, Rasheed, who is 30 years older than her. At first, Rasheed is kind, but as Miriam has miscarriage after miscarriage, with a grand total of six, he gets tired of her. After the last miscarriage he will not talk to her, but when he does it is only insults and words of hate.

The Story of Laila

When Miriam is about 30, a girl named Laila is born across the street. She is a beautiful little girl but is neglected by her mother because her mother is depressed by the deaths of Laila's older brothers in the war. As Laila grows up she begins to fall in love with her childhood playmate, Tariq. Everything is great between them until he announces that he is moving out of Afghanistan since things are getting so bad there. He asks her to marry him and come with him, and even though it kills her, she says no because she can't stand the thought of leaving her father behind.

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Two weeks after Tariq leaves Laila's family decides to leave as well. They are packing up their things when Laila takes a box out to their car and a rocket hits her house, killing her mother and father. She is found by Rasheed and nursed back to health by Miriam. Secretly, Rasheed hires a man to come and tell Laila that Tariq is dead, so that Laila has nowhere to go, because Rasheed wants to marry her. When he asks for her hand she says yes because she is pregnant with Tariq's child. The baby is a girl and is named Aziza. Rasheed is not happy that it's a girl so he neglects Aziza and does not provide for her.

Since Laila has disappointed him he starts treating her badly, so she starts stealing money from his wallet every week so that she, Miriam, and Aziza can run away. They make it to the bus doors before they are caught, sent home, and beaten by Rasheed. After some time Laila is pregnant again, this time with Rasheed's baby. A baby boy is born and is given the name Zalmai. Aziza is put in an orphanage as they are in the middle of a drought and all of Rasheed's money and attention goes towards Zalmai. Three weeks after putting Aziza in the orphanage Tariq appears at their house. Laila cries and hugs him and they talk for a very long time. At dinner Zalmai tells his father about this "strange male visitor". Rasheed gets so angry he violently beats Laila and then tries to actually choke her to death until Miriam runs out to the shed, grabs a shovel, and hits him so hard that he dies.

Laila then makes plans to go to Pakistan with Tariq, Aziza, Zalmai, and Miriam. But Miriam refuses to go because she knows she will only be a burden and she knows she must turn herself in before the Taliban find Rasheed's dead body and kills them all. In the end, Miriam does turn herself in and is killed for her crime. Tariq and Laila get married and live in Pakistan but they move back to Kabul a few years after the fighting has ended.

Khaled Hosseini's Passionate Story Telling

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It takes a lot of skill to make a reader “feel” the emotion in a piece of writing, and Khaled Hosseini does a great job of that by using very detailed sense of place in this book. One example of this was when Miriam describes how plain her house was and how it was built. Miriam says “they raised it with sun-dried bricks and plastered it with mud and handfuls of straw. It had two sleeping cots, a wooden table, two straight-backed chairs, a window, and shelves...where Nana placed her clay pots...”. This was our first chance to see what Miriam’s house looked like, and we can tell by this description that it was definitely very plain. Another example of a sense of place was when the author was describing the setting in which Miriam and Laila share their first cup of tea. He says, “as gunfire cracked in the hills, they watched the clouds slide over the moon and the last of the season’s fireflies charting bright yellow arcs in the dark.”

From this description you can tell that the setting was peaceful in the midst of the war. One last example of how the author uses sense of place was when Laila went to Herat to see Miriam’s old house she saw that there was “only half a single rotting, splintered board ... the floor is carpeted now with dry-edged leaves, broken bottles, discarded chewing gum, wild mushrooms, and old yellowed cigarette butts.” You can see from this that Miriam’s house was in very bad shape and that Laila must have understood Miriam in a new way for living in such a sad place for so long.

Full of Great Quotes

This book is full of great quotes, but here are three that meant a lot to me. The first quote that I liked was: “Not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings.” Miriam says this when she was about to be shot in the head and she was reflecting on her life. What she means was that though she came into this world as a *harami* or illegitimate child, she was leaving with a bang, seen by everyone. This quote shows that she was proud of the life she lived, and was able to see her death in a slightly positive light.

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The second quote that I found outstanding was: “One last time, Miriam did as she was told”. I thought this quote was especially important because at this point in the book you know Miriam, and you feel like you have lived her whole life. So you know that she was always very obedient, and corresponding with the first quote it just exemplifies what a life she had lead.

The last quote that was important to me was: “Laila has moved on. Because in the end she knows that’s all she can do. That and hope.” I thought this was a significant quote because although it truly applies to Laila, it can apply to anyone who has gone through a terrible time.

Lasting Importance for Humankind

This book has a lasting importance for human kind because it captures the lives of two people that we would never understand without this book.

For example, even though all of us students have been “involved” in the war by watching the news once or twice, we never really understood why the US went into Afghanistan and what was actually going on there. Also it is a great book to share with younger generations who might not know about what happened in Afghanistan. Since this book is so perfectly honest it will definitely at least give them a taste of what life was like for some people.

Read It, Even though It is a Sad Story

I would still recommend this book to other students even though I had to force myself to finish reading *A Thousand Splendid Suns* because it was so sad and I couldn’t handle the pain. I would only recommend it if the person was looking for a good cry. I will always remember this book as the saddest, or at least one of the saddest books I have ever read. I don’t think I would choose to read it again even though it held so much meaning. Overall, this book was a great one with an uplifting ending and I think everyone who is well prepared should read it.

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Selvi Bunce

C/o Language in India languageinindiaUSA@gmail.com

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