

AN OVERVIEW OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S NOVELS FROM HUMAN PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

Khaled Hosseini, the Afghan-American novelist who through his critically acclaimed novels: The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns and And the Mountain Echoed reintroduced Afghanistan, the country of his birth to the World in general and the Western World in particular. Afghanistan, in the past three or four decades, has been projected by the Western media and the Western Governments, as a country that epitomizes all that is evil and negative. Widespread destruction and desolation, unimaginable acts of cruelty and barbarity, moral and cultural bankruptcy, regressive mindset, aversion to progress, chaos and anarchy are things people generally identified and associated with Afghanistan and its people. In the present research paper the researcher has tried to exhibit the different hues of human relationships through his major and minor characters depicted in the three novels of Khaled Hosseini.

Keywords: Heart-wrenching, Redemption, Hope, Friendship, Loyalty, Betrayal, Desires, Aspirations, Desolation, Psyche

Introduction:

All three of Khaled Hosseini's novels are studies in human relations. They are not stories of Super Heroes and Super Heroines, but heart-breaking tales of ordinary men and women trying to better their lot in life. They are stories of their struggles, their friendships and loyalties, their betrayal and sense of guilt, their joys and sorrows, their desires and aspirations, their despair and frustration, their sacrifices, their attempts for salvation and redemption, and the hope of a better and brighter tomorrow. All three of Hosseini's novels are bildungsroman (novels tracing the spiritual, moral, psychological or social development and growth of the main characters, usually from childhood to maturity).

Hosseini's debut novel, **The Kite Runner** tells the story of a son, who is trying to prove his worth and win back the undivided love of his father. It's a story of a father's expectations and a son's desperate attempts to latch on to any opportunity

that would take him close to his father's heart. It's a story of Amir, the protagonist, a motherless child whose mother died while giving birth to him and who has been living with the guilt that he is the cause of her death. He thinks that he has robbed his father of his most prized possession. He is well provided for, but there is an emotional vacuum in his life. He constantly looks for that love in his father's eye, always eager to hear a word of love and appreciation, a pat on the back, an embrace, a sit on his lap. It pains him to see his father showering his love and praise on Hassan, his servant Ali's son, and always giving Hassan preference over him. This causes bitterness in Amir's heart for Hassan, who is his most loyal friend, his biggest supporter and admirer, his Kite Runner. Hassan's world revolves round Amir. He is ready to do anything for his "Amir Agha."

Amir gets an opportunity to prove his worth and earn his Baba's praise and love that he has always been craving for. It's the annual Kite fighting competition. It enjoys the status of national sport and winning this competition is a matter of pride and prestige. Amir's father expresses his wish that his son should win this competition. Amir quickly realizes that winning the competition is his "key to Baba's heart." He wins the competition but in the process betrays his all-caring, all sacrificing friend, Hassan. He displays the selfish and sheepish side of his personality. While Hassan is enduring the physical pain of rape just to save the "blue kite," his Amir Agha's key to his Baba's heart, Amir stands there as a mute spectator. He doesn't intervene to save Hassan for fear of being beaten up by Assef and his friends and also for fear of losing the only hope – the blue kite-his key—that can win his Baba back for him. He wins his father's love but the very sight of Hassan reminds him of his act of betrayal. He suffers from an all-consuming sense of guilt. Amir lives with this guilt for twenty-six years till he rescues Hassan's son, Sohrab, from the clutches of Assef, and in doing so endures the physical pain that Hassan had endured for him years ago. He ultimately gets rid of his guilt, atones for his sin, and redeems himself by doing for Sohrab what he couldn't do for his father.

It is indeed a beautifully crafted novel that showcases father-son relationship with all its complexities; a motherless child's craving for love and recognition; a loyal friend's selfless and all-sacrificing love; a servant's (Ali) loyalty, despite being betrayed by the master in the worst possible way; a friend's (Rahim Khan) unwavering friendship; class distinctions; ethnic animosities, and the stark portrayal of reality. This heart-wrenching novel is truly a tale of love, friendship, redemption and hope.

Hosseini's second novel **A Thousand Splendid Suns**, like *The Kite Runner*, has Afghanistan as the setting. It's a multi-generational saga that chronicles the lives of two indomitable women; Mariam and Laila. It is the female counterpart of *The Kite Runner*. *The Kite Runner* is a male-dominated novel with hardly any female character of import. Similarly *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a female-dominated novel depicting the lives and struggles of its two Protagonists - Mariam and Laila. All the other characters play second fiddle to them. It is a story of the lives and the struggles of these two women: Mariam, an illegitimate child, a harami, whose life is an unending and painful tale of suffering and humiliations; and Laila, a bubbly, outgoing, freedom-loving girl born to liberal parents who believe in girl's education and equal rights but fate changes the course of her life. She ends up being the second wife of a man forty-five years her senior who has Mariam as his first wife. Both these ill-fated and desperate women vie for the love and attention of a cruel and uncaring husband. From competitors trying to hold on to whatever little they have, their animosity towards each other gradually turns to friendship. Laila's little daughter Aziza brings them together. And what begins then is a beautiful mother-daughter relationship between Mariam and Laila. Mariam plays the mother to both Laila and Aziza. They create a pleasant little world of their own inside the four walls of their dilapidated house. Rasheed's behaviour towards his wives becomes more and more cruel and violent. During one such rage when he tries to harm Laila, Mariam hits him with a shovel and he dies. Mariam sacrifices her life to save Laila and her children, and this brings to a legitimate end her painful life of illegitimacy.

This heart-wrenching novel vividly and graphically portrays the lives of Afghan women—the silent, unheard of, and uncared for, other half of the Afghan population. They have been the victims of dual atrocities; the outward violence—the killings and cruelties perpetrated by the different warring factions, the social and tribal

customs and norms that have literally confined them to their homes; and the violence and atrocities that they face inside their houses, virtual slaves to their husbands, whose joys and sorrows, laughter and tears depend on the caprice of their husbands. They endure unbearable physical and mental pain; serve as punching bags for their husbands to vent their anger and frustration on. The novel shows how love manifests itself in even more various shapes, be it romantic love, or love for family, home, country, God. 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.

Hosseini's third novel, **And the Mountains Echoed** is like his previous two novels, a study in human relations. After successfully portraying the father-son relationship in his male-dominated debut novel *The Kite Runner*, and his equally successful attempt in depicting the mother-daughter relationship in his female dominated second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini, in his third novel turns to exploring sibling relationship. It is a story of a ten-year-old boy Abdullah's intense and immaculate love for his three-year-old sister Pari. An Extreme poverty which is a reality of present day Afghanistan forces Saboor, the father of Abdullah and Pari, to sell Pari to a wealthy childless couple of Kabul in order to save the family from imminent starvation. The novel revolves round this incident; a parent's choice to sell a child to save his other children from dying of starvation. Deviating from the storyline of his two previous novels where he focused on developing the story in a linear manner with all the characters and events closely associated and connected with it. *And the Mountains Echoed* is like nine stories divided into nine chapters narrated by different characters. These different stories are like branches independent in themselves but attached to the common trunk i.e. the story of Abdullah and Pari.

The novel begins with a fable that a father tells his two children Abdullah and Pari: A farmer who works hard to make a living for his family is forced to give up one of his five children to a djinn. He and his wife decide to choose randomly and the unlucky chosen child also happens to be their favorite one. Eventually over the years, the farmer, maddened with grief and guilt, tracks down the djinn and finds his son playing in a lush garden full of happy children with no memory of his family. The father is unable to summon the will and the courage to take the child from this place of

plenty back to his drought-stricken village and so he decides to leave without him. The truth of the story dawns upon Abdullah and Pari when their father takes them to Kabul to sell Pari to a wealthy childless couple. This event completely devastates Abdullah who is so emotionally attached to his sister and never forgets her. With the passage of time, Pari, like the child in the fable, forgets everything about her family but Abdullah keeps her memories alive. Even when he leaves Afghanistan and settles in the United States, his love for Pari never subsides. His love for his lost sister is so intense that he names his own daughter after her. They do unite in the end but Abdullah who suffers from Alzheimer fails to recognize her.

Besides the story of Abdullah and Pari, we have another sibling story, the story of Parwana, Abdullah and Pari's step mother, her paralyzed sister Masooma and their brother Nabi. Parwana in the fit of jealousy pushes her more beautiful, better liked sister, Masooma off the swing. Masooma suffers debilitating injury that renders her paralyzed for life. Realizing her mistake and in an effort to atone for her sin, Parwana takes care of her paralyzed sister. Nabi, their brother, is a cook and chauffeur at the household of Mr. and Mrs. Wahdati. He is secretly in love with Nila Wahdati, and to win her love, he arranges for the selling of Pari to the Wahdatis, who are childless. It is through Nabi's letter years later that Pari comes to know the truth of her life and reunites with her brother.

Conclusion:

Through his intelligent and artistic amalgamation of facts and fiction, both in situations as well as characters, Hosseini successfully presented before the world that beneath the apparent turmoil, gloom, destruction and desolation, lies a beautiful country; rich in history and culture, and a people who have, despite experiencing unimaginable hardships and unspeakable cruelty, the scars of which they still carry on their mind, body and psyche, not abandoned humanity. People exhibit unparalleled examples of love, friendship and loyalty even in some of the most trying and unfavorable circumstances. Timidity, cowardice, circumstances and weakness of character may lead

a man astray for some time and force him to commit some acts of selfishness and betrayal, but ultimately through his acts of kindness and courage, he redeems himself. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. Hosseini's novels and characters justify this natural phenomenon. No matter how turbulent and bleak one's past and present are, future always holds promise of a better and brighter tomorrow.

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