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A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS: A BLEND OF DOMESTIC AND NATIONAL TRAGEDY

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ABSTRACT

A Thousand Splendid Suns is an exceptional work of postcolonial writing. It is penned by Khaled Hosseini, who is an Afghani writer. The novel received worldwide fame and it had given Hosseini an international recognition. The story of the novel is rooted in later half of 20th century Afghan society which was tormented by the tyrannical rule of communists and Taliban. The novel unfolds the Afghan society caught in the turmoil of war between Nazibullah and Talibani forces. Nazibullah was brought up in the ideology of communists and he hated the Talibani mode of thinking. The war left thousands of people dead and still thousands lost their limbs in rocket attack. Nazibullah could not withhold the brutal Talibani attack for long time and was caught and beheaded on public street as a perpetual reminder to Afghani people (they would also face the same brutality if they raise their voices in protest). In the midst of this national tragedy underlie brutal domestic tragedy of two women – Mariam and Laila. In fact, all Afghani women more or less received the same treatment and many of them meet the same fate as Mariam and Laila but the major focus of attention in the novel are two above mentioned women. Besides, Mariam and Laila, there was Nana, Aziza, Mummy and host of other women who are the silent sufferers. The domestic tragedy is so skillfully blended into national tragedy that it is difficult to separate the one from the other.

Keywords: splendid, communist, domestic, Afghani women

National Tragedy

The National tragedy starts with the killing of thousands of people on daily basis. The tussle between Taliban forces and forces of ruling Nazibullah government results into the rocket attack upon houses of innocent people. Many people lost their lives in rocket attack and some had lost their body parts when the rocket hit them or some objects fell upon them. There was a funeral ceremony at every house. But the forces of war who were fighting for their ideologies considering them as the only gospel truth in the universe are completely unaware of the loss and the suffering of families who had lost their near and dear. Besides, civilian deaths, there were young boys who had to join the military forces to serve their nation, lost their lives and left their dependent

family members to weep upon their dead bodies. Tariq was one of the young men who lost his leg and he was the only son of his parents. He had an artificial leg to manage his daily affairs. Babi and Mummy lost their two sons (Laila's brothers) in war. Laila's mother became hysterical and lost her interest in life. The loss of two sons left Mummy so hopeless that she was not even aware of the fact that she had a daughter to take care of. On the other hand, Babi decided to pay more attention to Laila who was his only hope for future although he was also shattered by the death of his sons. He wanted his daughter Laila to grow with liberal thoughts and attain some position in life. He wanted to give wings to her dreams. But unfortunately he did not survive to see the future journey of his daughter. Babi and Mummy met their unfortunate and painful end on one morning when they were packing the essential things to leave Afghanistan for Pakistan or some other safe place where they could live with satisfaction and love.

When communists left the centre of power from Afghanistan, they wanted to reassure their authority on somebody who could continue the communist line of thinking through government headquarters. Communists chose to rest the responsibility of Afghanistan government on Nazibullah who was in many ways as advocate of communist thought. Nazibullah wanted to resurrect the communist ideology in schools, colleges and people's day to day lives. But he did not succeed in his attempt. In an attempt to kill Taliban forces he killed many innocent people through the rocket attack. Babi (Laila's Father) thought that communist rule was good in many ways for Afghanistan though he lost his job due to these people. Babi was an intellectual person who had a sense of differentiation. The fight between Taliban forces and Nazibullah did not last for long time. Soon he was caught and beheaded. His head was kept on signal lamppost to induce an air of horror on those who passed by that road.

The evening of communist rule led to the dawn of brutal Taliban rule which was dogmatic, tyrannical and blind. If Nazibullah's rule was anarchic and unlawful, Taliban rule restricted people to live in the normal course of life. Both men and women were given severe punishment if they are found to be violating the rules and code of conduct designed by Taliban government. The Taliban ideology was made to be practiced forcefully by all. The Taliban ideology was narrowly dogmatic for women who were the worst victims of the whole system. Mariam and Laila both were severely whipped by Taliban soldiers for not accompanying them any male members of the family. But men like Rashid were very happy to have the government like Taliban. Because it allowed them to practice polygamy and to treat women like objects. In fact, this kind of ideology is loved by all those who are born and brought up in patriarchal system.

Domestic Tragedy

The novel beautifully portrays the struggle of two women to escape the brutal and lethal paws of man called Rashid. Both Mariam and Laila were the victims of humiliation, domestic violence and maltreatment which they received from Rashid. They were the only support of each other in the anarchic world of Rashid. They played the role of backstage actors whose untold pains were not reported, appreciated and silently suffer the pains of humiliation in most part of the novel. There are some other women like Nana, Aziza, Giti and Hasina (Laila's friend) who were also victims of same tyrannical and patriarchal system. Nana was Mariam's unfortunate mother who died in early part of the novel by hanging herself to tree. Mariam was the immoral child of Nana and Jalil as she was referred in the novel as "Harami". Except Mullah Faizullah, nobody shows affection for Nana and Mariam. Mariam also has equal affection for Mullah Faizullah. All that is good she learnt in her life had been taught by Mullah Faizullah. Jalil comes once a week to pay a visit to Nana and Mariam but his visit is just a formality and his repentance for the sense of guilt. Mariam had great affection for Jalil but she knew little about Jalil's fake affection. Mariam had a great expectations from Jalil but he did not come true to her expectations. When she went to Jalil's house to meet him, she was sent forcefully back to Nana's house. But Nana did not bear the shock of Mariam's departure and she hung herself thinking Mariam had left her for Jalil. After Nana's death, Mariam became orphan, Jalil went to bring her back to his house. Mariam was surprised to see the sudden transformation in Jalil. But soon she realized that he wanted to get rid of her by marrying her to Rashid who was twenty years older than her. Mariam's life did not change even after her marriage to a widow man.

Mariam's marriage to Rashid was complete disaster. Rashid married to Mariam to get a woman who could take care of his house, who could cook for him and to cater his sexual needs. Rashid tried to behave with Mariam in a way good husband behave with their wives. Then the real man came out of him and he began to behave with her in rude manner. Occasionally Mariam had to face physical assaults. In beginning days she never tried to resist herself from the domestic violence. Then she became accustomed to it. She began to lose her interest in life. Life had no meaning for her in the past and it also had no meaning for her when she became Rashid's wife. Mariam had some hope from life when she became pregnant for first time. But the child did not survive and Mariam also lost all her hopes in life. After that incident Mariam began to live like a patient without sensibility. She began to experience what is called 'life in death'. The last chapter of Mariam's life began when Laila came to Rashid's house. Her female jealousy was aroused when Rashid married to Laila and began to pay more attention to her. But soon she understood that Laila's fate was not different from her and all her jealousy for Laila fade away. She became partner in her sorrow. She began to protest her from Rashid's physical assaults whenever possible. At one point in life she became so selfless that she put her life in danger when she helped Laila to run away to Pakistan. She did not get successful in her attempt but she did not lose her heart. She knew that she had left nothing for her in life. She wanted to live her life for Laila, her son Zalmai and daughter Aziza. As she was childless, she always treated Laila's children as her own. Her sacrifice for Laila and her children became ultimate when she took the charge of Rashid's murder upon her shoulders. The ordeal of Mariam's life came to end when she was given death punishment for Rashid's murder.

Laila was yet another victim of Rashid's brutalities. She was a bright and promising daughter of Babi and Mummy. Mummy had a little affection for her but Babi was aware of her full potential and he wanted her to do something in life. Laila's friend Giti and Hasina were confident of Laila's future growth. Nobody had even the slightest idea that Laila would be in such horrible situation when she had to marry Rashid forcefully. Laila's marriage to Rashid was compromise because she was apprehensive of Tariq's child in her womb. When the child was born, Rashid became suspicious of Aziza's biological father. Rashid's treatment to Laila became more deadly and brutal when Laila began to resist Rashid's physical assaults. Laila's transformation from a bright and promising girl to a meek and helpless wife was really shocking for all those who knew her from her childhood. Laila found herself orphan one day and Rashid took her to his house with intention to marry her. Laila's life became hell after her marriage to Rashid but in that hellish situation Mariam was the only comfort for Laila. These two women became a source of hope for each other and their togetherness was the only meaning of life for them. Their struggle for survival was encouraging for those women who want to break the shackles of tyranny.

Conclusion

The novel "A Thousand Splendid Suns" is a skillful blend of national and domestic tragedy. The action of the novel run parallel as the writer describes the events in general and events from Laila and Mariam's life. After the death of Rashid and Mariam, Laila began to live with Tariq in Afghanistan with some comfort. But the memories of the past and Mariam's supreme sacrifice for Laila and her children always kept Laila in debt. She never forgot Mariam and her unfortunate life which was full of misery and pain.

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