

**MAA OMWATI DEGREE COLLEGE HASSANPUR  
(PALWAL)**

**Subject- Asian Literature (MC)**

**Class- MA English 4<sup>th</sup> Sem.(NEP)**

**Code- 25ENG204DS01**

**UNIT 1**

## Like a Diamond in the Sky

*Like a Diamond in the Sky* is about a couple of rich university kids who fall into a circuit of drugs in the slums of Bangladesh. The story explores their feeling of alienation in the chaotic metropolis of Dhaka city and the social fabric of the community around them. The protagonist, Deen, struggles to find a spiritual connection, but he is unable to transcend his physical reality, all the more so because of his addiction. (The classic conflict between *din* and *duniya* – the spiritual and material.) This is his journey to redemption.

This story may be compared to *City of God* or *Trainspotting*, with the classic theme of sex, drugs and rock n' roll, but in this book it all takes place in the emerging megacity of modern Dhaka. The subtle rot that pervades all classes of society finds its playground in the gritty underworld, an aspect of the city which has never been exposed in a novel. In this complex, and sometimes savage setting, Deen battles to master the two sides of his nature.

### **Who did you write the book for? What audience did you have in mind?**

I have some close friends who are recovering addicts. Their strength inspired me to write this book. Drugs are a growing problem in Bangladesh, especially among the youth. Addictions, mental illness, depression, these are all considered 'taboo' topics here, so no one talks about them. People need to know more about addiction. I hope some of the young people currently hooked on drugs will read this book and realize how dangerous their so-called-party scene is for their health and well-being.

I also hope people outside of Bangladesh will read this book and learn a little more about what life here is like. Bangladesh is a place most people don't have any access to. Globally, people are only familiar with the country's monsoons... and micro credit schemes. While micro credit is a cool, innovative way to empower the poor, it's still all about poverty. I wanted use this novel to share a bit about our art, our culture, our thoughts, our voices, our ideas.

I think everyone can relate to the underlying theme – the search for happiness and the battle against loneliness that consumes us all. The metaphor of the addict also reminds us of our negative proclivities and the importance of staying positive.

### **Who are your greatest literary influences?**

There are so many, I'm not sure where to begin. I like the simplistic style of Hemmingway and Fitzgerald, the chiseling away of details, till you're left with something very fine. That's something I've tried to do. I like the manic emotions of Jack Kerouac's writing (my protagonist is named after his Dean Moriarty) and Marquez's

imagery (yellow butterflies make their way into my novel). I like how Arundhati Roy comfortably nestles foreign words into her prose.

**You describe a dark and dangerous world, how much of this was inspired from real life experiences?**

Through my friends, I had the good fortune of meeting Doctor Yusuf Merchant who runs a rehab in Mumbai. I spent a month there, learning from him, about addiction, so this book is heavily researched. I spent a month in a village talking to ultra poor women to explore their understanding of happiness in order to do the research for my thesis – I was doing a masters in social psychology at the London School of Economics. That shaped one of the characters in my book, Falani, the drug dealer who lives in the slum. (I wrote the book a few months after finishing my thesis.) LSE is also very leftist and socialist and some of that political discourse made its way into my story.

**As a first time novelist what were the major hurdles from pitch to publication?**

As a Bangladeshi novelist, the challenge is that we don't have a well-developed book industry. We have only a couple of bookstores, a couple of publishers, and less than 100,000 English readers. I also don't have any access to publishing communities or writing communities outside of Bangladesh.

However, I got very lucky.

A group of Indian publishers were in Dhaka for an India Bangladesh Festival of Books and Writers organized by the Indo-Bangla Cultural Initiative and Independent University of Bangladesh. That was a great initiative and I hope there are others like it in the future, perhaps organized by British Council, BBC, or the American Embassy, to give us even greater outreach and exposure.

I'm a member of a group called Writers Block. We invited the publishers from India to have tea with us. There I gave them my manuscript. I was lucky that Zubaan/ Penguin India they chose to publish it and take a risk with me, an unknown Bangladeshi writer. I am grateful for these opportunities. I have yet to find a publisher in the UK/ USA.

**What are your experiences of being a female writer? Do you think they differ to your male peers?**

Who you are emerges in your writing. Your gender affects your emotions, experiences, thoughts, and also how you relate to the world. Your age, education, family, where you've lived, who you've met, all these things play a role too. And then there's the creative element, which comes from a tap of magic water, according to Harun from the sea of stories.

Though my gender may affect my take on life and hence my writing, I don't think it has affected my experience as a writer. I haven't faced any sort of discrimination, if that's what you mean.

**As a writer living and writing in the East, how do you hope to connect with readers from the West?**

This is a challenge I have yet to overcome. I spent most of my life living in the West. I grew up in Canada, did my undergrad in USA, my masters in London. I've also spent over seven years in Bangladesh and here I'm very much an insider, so I feel my writing is a mix of East and West, meant for audiences both East and West, but there's also a question of publishing and distribution, etc. In general though, I think the lines between East and West are dissolving as we become an increasingly global race, especially thanks to the internet!

Shazia Omar is a social psychologist. She completed her undergrad at Dartmouth then worked for a year as an investment banker in New York. After three years of traveling, visiting ashrams and learning yoga, she completed

a Masters at LSE. Shazia is a member of Writers Block Bangladesh. She works at a development agency and teaches pilates.

## UNIT 2

### TehminaDurrani

TehminaDurrani (born 18 February 1953) is a Pakistani author known for her bestselling book *My Feudal Lord*, an artist, and a women's and children's rights activist. She is the current spouse of the Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif since March 2024. Sharif has previously served in the post from 10 April 2022 to 13 August 2023.

### Life

TehminaDurrani, born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan into a mixed paternal Pashtun and maternal Punjabi family, was the daughter of a former Governor of State Bank of Pakistan and managing director of Pakistan International Airlines, ShahkurUllahDurrani. TehminaDurrani's paternal grandfather was Major Muhammad ZamanDurrani. Tehmina's mother, SaminaDurrani, is the daughter of Nawab Sir Liaqat Hayat Khan, the prime minister of the former princely state of Patiala. Sir LiaqatHyat Khan's brother, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, was a pre-1947 Punjab Premier, a statesman and leader.

At seventeen, she married Anees Khan, and they had one daughter together. Durrani and Khan divorced in 1976. Durrani later married Ghulam Mustafa Khar, a former Chief Minister and Governor of Punjab. Khar had been married five times. Durrani and Khar had four children. After being abused by Khar for several years, she ended her marriage of fourteen years in divorce.

In 1991, Durrani wrote an autobiography titled *My Feudal Lord* alleging abuse by Khar. She argued in the book that the real power of feudal landlords, like Khar, is derived from the distorted version of Islam that is supported by the silence of women and of society as a whole.

As a reaction to her expository book, her family on both the paternal and maternal sides disowned her and her five children for thirteen years.

In the years after leaving her second husband, Khar, one prominent event was her hunger strike in 1993 against government corruption, and the newly coined term, 'accountability', came into being. After seven days she was admitted to hospital and it was only when the prime minister of Pakistan, MoinQuraishi, visited her to break her fast did she do so.

After many years of political exposure through her ex-husband, Mustafa Khar, who was a political leader, and in her struggle against corruption, she realized that the answers she was seeking would not come through politicians. In her search for someone who was in touch with the problems of the common man, and who had found a solution, she found Pakistan's most celebrated humanitarian, Abdul SattarEdhi.

She moved in with the Edhi family and spent three years serving at Edhi Homes in Mithadar, Sorab Goth, and Kharadar, Karachi. She became his apprentice, and also got his permission to author his autobiography. These years shadowing Edhisahab were a thesis for the dissertation of the book. These years were perhaps her most transformational as they laid the seeds for her further work as well as her spiritual quest for truth. "While I tied coffins to abandoned babies, stepped over corpses, and drove with him in a 'peoples' ambulance, I recorded the thoughts, inspirations, motives, observations, views and works of Pakistan's most revered and renowned social reformer." In 1994, *A Mirror to the Blind*, Edhi's official 'narrated' autobiography, was endorsed and published by the Edhi Foundation.

In 2003, Durrani married thrice-elected Chief Minister of Punjab, Shehbaz Sharif. They were married in a private ceremony in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Durrani resides in Lahore with her husband, who is Prime Minister of Pakistan and a part of the politically prominent Sharif family, and the brother of Nawaz Sharif, the Ex- Prime Minister of Pakistan.

### **My Feudal Lord rights dispute**

In June 1991, *My Feudal Lord* was released by Vanguard Books, a company owned by the journalists Najam Sethi and Jugnu Mohsin. Durrani denied she signed a contract vesting complete foreign rights with Mohsin rather than with herself and her estate. The dispute was settled in 1992.[citation needed]

On 19 May 1999, Durrani accused Sethi of stealing her book profits. She said, "[his actions were] an even bigger case of hypocrisy than my experience with the feudal system." At the time, Sethi was being detained without charge by Intelligence Bureau (Pakistan) for his comments to a British Broadcasting Corporation news team about government corruption. Durrani sued Sethi for mental torture, and he countersued for defamation. A review of the book contracts by the English newspaper *The Independent* described Sethi as acting in good faith and described him and Mohsin as "the injured party".

### **Activist - acid attacks on women**

Since 2005, Durrani has supported the social rehabilitation of women. In 2001, Durrani cared for Fakhra Younus, a former wife of Bilal Khar, the son of Khar from his third marriage. Younus had been attacked with acid, allegedly by her husband. Durrani's arrangements to take Younus abroad captured media attention. Younus was denied a passport to leave Pakistan but under public pressure was later allowed to leave. Durrani engaged the Italian cosmetics firm Sant' Angelica and the government of Italy to treat Younus. Smile Again, an Italian NGO head by Clarice Felli entered Pakistan to assist in the care of mutilated women. Italian mother left Pakistan after falling out with the chapter run by Musarat Misba of Depilex over financial discrepancies. On 17 March 2012, Younus died by suicide in Italy and was buried in Karachi. Durrani received Younus' body draped in an Italian and a Pakistan flag. The funeral prayers for Younus took place at the Edhi Centre in Kharadar. The 2012 Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy and Daniel Junge directed critically acclaimed documentary film *Saving Face* was made on Younus' life, which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary, among several other accolades.[citation needed]

### **Tehmina Durrani Foundation**

Founded in 2015, Tehmina Durrani Foundation ([www.tehminadurrani.org](http://www.tehminadurrani.org)) officially launched its activities in January, 2017. Tehmina Durrani explains, "We are picking the mission of Edhi, where he left. His duty was to serve the humanity without distinction of caste and creed – and so is ours."

The core ideas in its Mission and Vision are:

1. Establishing Pakistan as a Social Welfare State.

2. Teaching the Edhi ideology of humanitarianism, tolerance, and service to others less privileged.
3. Women's empowerment through economic independence.
4. Protection and rehabilitation of the children of war.

### **My Feudal Lord (1991)**

Her most famous book, which was an overnight best seller and sensation in Pakistan as well as around the world. It is based on her life. Tehmina Durrani was born into one of Pakistan's most aristocratic families. Her parents married her to Anees Khan when she was seventeen and they had a daughter together. While married, she met Mustafa Khar, an eminent Pakistani politician, who along with Bhutto founded the PPP political party. Tehmina and Khar got married after she divorced, but their honeymoon period turned bitter very quickly. The intense and grotesque abuse is described vividly in her book with gory details. She was brave enough to expose her then famous husband publicly in an extremely conservative Pakistani Muslim society. She paid a heavy price for it because she was shunned by society and her own parents disowned her. Her rebellious nature also cost her losing all financial support from her ex-husband, as well as the custody of her children. It did make her search for answers for the position of women within Islam and made her stand up for women's rights.[citation needed]

As no publisher was willing to take the liability of such a controversial book, she initially printed it herself, and after it became a hot selling book, it was published by Vanguard books. My Feudal Lord has been translated into 40 languages and has received many awards.

### **A Mirror to the Blind (1996)**

Durrani's second book, A Mirror to the Blind, is the biography of Abdul Sattar Edhi,[22] who was Pakistan's highly decorated social worker. Over a three-year period, Durrani lived in Edhi's home and accompanied him on his visits. The book was published in 1996 by the National Bureau of Publications with the Edhi Foundation. It is the official document Abdul Sattar Edhi's life and message.

### **Blasphemy (1998)**

Her third book, Blasphemy (1998), was successful but also controversial. In the novel she describes the secret lives of the Muslim clergy and spiritual leaders or pirs. Durrani said that the story is factual, with some names and events altered to protect the identity of the women who are at the center of the story. The book also delves into a critical approach to the tradition and practice of Nikah Halala. She describes several cases resulting in the humiliation and torture of Muslim women. The book also made it into Pakistan's best-seller list.

### **Happy Things in Sorrow Times (2013)**

Durrani's fourth book "Happy Things in Sorrow Times" (2013) is a novel based on the childhood and youth of an Afghan girl Rabia. The novel was published by Pakistani Publishing group Ferozsons. In contrast to Blasphemy that is based on the issue of domestic violence, Hypocrisy of religious figures in rural Sindh (Pakistan), and distortion of Islamic values, this novel explores the dynamics of Afghan politics in the pre/post 9/11. The setting of the novel is Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the protagonist of the novel is an Afghan girl. The novel critiques interventions of Russia and America in Afghanistan. This is the first novel where Durrani uses her artwork as well.[citation needed]

### **Artist**

Tehmina Durrani is also a painter. She says she found another way of expressing and conveying her feelings through art, in addition to writing.

Her first exhibit, Catharsis, was held in 1992. One of those paintings became the cover of her third book Blasphemy.[citation needed]

TehminaDurrani's next exhibit, A Love Affair, took place in 2016. She will be intertwining her writing and painting in her coffee table book by the same name, A Love Affair, with a print version of these paintings along with poems and songs that inspired her paintings.

### UNIT 3

#### *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a 2007 novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini, following the huge success of his bestselling 2003 debut *The Kite Runner*. Mariam, an illegitimate teenager from Herat, is forced to marry a shoemaker from Kabul after a family tragedy. Laila, born a generation later, lives a relatively privileged life, but her life intersects with Mariam's when a similar tragedy forces her to accept a marriage proposal from Mariam's husband.

Hosseini has remarked that he regards the novel as a "mother-daughter story" in contrast to *The Kite Runner*, which he considers a "father-son story" It continues some of the themes used in his previous work, such as familial dynamics, but instead focusing primarily on female characters and their roles in contemporary Afghan society.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released on May 22, 2007, and received favorable widespread critical acclaim from *Kirkus Reviews*, *Publishers Weekly*,<sup>[4]</sup> *Library Journal* and *Booklist*, and became a number one *New York Times* Best Seller for fifteen weeks following its release During its first week on sale, it sold over one million copies Columbia Pictures purchased film rights in 2007, and a theatrical adaptation of the book premiered on February 1, 2017, at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, California.

#### **Creation**

##### **Title**

The title of the book comes from a line in Josephine Davis' translation of the poem "Kabul", by the 17th-century Iranian poet Saib Tabrizi: "Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eye

Through the bazaars, caravans of Egypt pass

One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs

And the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls"

Hosseini explained "I was searching for English translations of poems about Kabul, for use in a scene where a character bemoans leaving his beloved city, when I found this particular verse. I realized that I had found not only the right line for the scene, but also an evocative title in the phrase 'a thousand splendid suns,' which appears in the next-to-last stanza."

#### **Inspiration**

When asked what led him to write a novel centered on two Afghan women, Hosseini responded:

"I had been entertaining the idea of writing a story of Afghan women for some time after I'd finished writing *The Kite Runner*. That first novel was a male-dominated story. All the major characters, except perhaps for Amir's wife Soraya, were men. There was a whole facet of Afghan society which I hadn't touched on in *The Kite Runner*, an entire landscape that I felt was fertile with story ideas...In the spring of 2003, I went to Kabul, and I recall

seeing these burqa-clad women sitting at street corners, with four, five, six children, begging for change. I remember watching them walking in pairs up the street, trailed by their children in ragged clothes, and wondering how life had brought them to that point...I spoke to many of those women in Kabul. Their life stories were truly heartbreaking...When I began writing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over. Though no one woman that I met in Kabul inspired either Laila or Mariam, their voices, faces, and their incredible stories of survival were always with me, and a good part of my inspiration for this novel came from their collective spirit."

## Writing

"I hope the book offers emotional subtext to the image of the burqa-clad woman walking down a dusty street in Kabul." —Khaled Hosseini in a 2007 interview.

Hosseini disclosed that in some ways, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was more difficult to write than his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. He noted the anticipation for his second book when writing it, compared to *The Kite Runner* wherein "no one was waiting for it." He also found his second novel to be more "ambitious" than the first due to its larger cast of characters; its dual focus on Mariam and Laila; and its covering a multi-generational period of nearly forty-five years in total. However, he found the novel easier to write once he had begun, noting "as I began to write, as the story picked up the pace and I found myself immersed in the world of Mariam and Laila, these apprehensions vanished on their own. The developing story captured me and enabled me to tune out the background noise and get on with the business of inhabiting the world I was creating." The characters "took on a life of their own" at this point and "became very real for [him]".

Similar to *The Kite Runner*, the manuscript had to be extensively revised; with Hosseini ultimately rewriting the book five times before it was complete. The novel's anticipated release was first announced in October 2006, when it was described as a story about "family, friendship, faith and the salvation to be found in love".

## Plot

On the outskirts of Herat, Mariam lives with her embittered mother, Nana, in a secluded hut. Born as the result of an affair between her mother and Jalil, a wealthy local businessman, Mariam and her mother live outside the city in order to avoid confronting Jalil's legitimate family. Nana resents Jalil for his actions and deceptive attitude towards Mariam, whom he visits every Thursday. On Mariam's fifteenth birthday, Jalil does not show up to take her to see Pinocchio in town as promised. Against Nana's wishes, Mariam travels to Herat herself to find her father, and sleeps outside his house when told he is away, but later discovers he was home the entire time. Heartbroken, she returns home to find that Nana has committed suicide by hanging. Briefly moving into Jalil's house, Mariam is soon rushed into marriage with Rasheed, a widowed shoemaker from Kabul thirty years her senior, and moves to Kabul. Rasheed is initially courteous to Mariam, but over the course of seven miscarriages he becomes increasingly abusive toward her, angered by her inability to provide him a son. Years later, an ailing Jalil attempts to visit Mariam but she refuses to allow him inside.

Meanwhile, Mariam's young neighbor Laila grows up close to her schoolteacher father and is worried for her mother, who is deeply depressed following the death of her two sons fighting for the Mujahideen against the Soviets. Laila is close friends with Tariq, a local Pashtun boy with one leg, and romance develops between them as they grow up. When Laila is fourteen, civil war breaks out in Afghanistan, and Kabul is bombarded by frequent rocket attacks. Tariq's family decide to leave the city and, while saying their good-byes, he and Laila have sex in a moment of passion. Shortly after, a rocket hits Laila's home as they prepare to flee, killing her parents. She is taken in by Mariam and Rasheed, and as she recovers from her injuries, Rasheed begins courting her, to Mariam's dismay. A man arrives at Rasheed's home to inform Laila that Tariq and his family died in a

bomb blast on their way to Pakistan. Realizing that she is pregnant with Tariq's child, Laila agrees to marry Rasheed, convincing Rasheed that the child is his. She gives birth to a daughter, whom she names Aziza.

The childless Mariam initially treats Laila coldly, avoiding contact with her and Aziza. They eventually become friends, forming a close mother-daughter-like bond, and support each other in enduring Rasheed's abuse and raising Aziza. They attempt to flee one day, but are caught by the local police and severely beaten and nearly starved by Rasheed as punishment.

Meanwhile, the Taliban rise to power in Kabul and impose harsh rules on the local population, severely curtailing women's rights. Laila is forced to give birth to a son, Zalmai, via caesarian section without anaesthesia in a deprived women's hospital. Laila and Mariam struggle with raising Zalmai, whom Rasheed dotes on and favors over Aziza. During a drought, Rasheed's workshop burns down, and he is forced to take other jobs, worsening his mood and abuse. Due to a lack of food, Rasheed forces Laila to send Aziza to an orphanage and refuses to accompany her to visit Aziza. Laila endures beatings from the Taliban for travelling alone to visit Aziza.

One day, Tariq suddenly shows up on Laila's doorstep, much to her shock. Laila realizes that Rasheed had paid the man to lie to her about Tariq's death, so that she would stay in Kabul and marry him. Laila and Mariam plan to escape again, this time with Tariq's help. However, when Rasheed returns home from work, Zalmai informs his father Rasheed that Laila had a male visitor. Enraged, Rasheed reveals that he has suspected Aziza's true paternity all along and begins viciously beating the women and attempts to strangle Laila. To save Laila, Mariam kills Rasheed with a shovel. Knowing the Taliban would be after them, Mariam decides to turn herself in to draw attention away from Laila and Tariq's escape with the children. Confessing the murder to the Taliban, Mariam is sentenced to public execution. She complies peacefully, having found unexpected happiness and love in her years with Laila and the children.

Laila and Tariq successfully escape Afghanistan with the children and move east to Murree in the Pakistani Punjab, and they marry. After the fall of the Taliban, they return to Kabul to join the rebuilding of Afghan society. They stop en route to Herat, and Laila visits the village where Mariam was raised. She meets with the son of a kindly mullah who had taught Mariam, and he gives her a box Jalil had left for Mariam should she return to Herat. The box contains a videotape of Pinocchio, a sack of money, and a letter in which Jalil expresses his regret and love for Mariam, wishing he had fought for her and raised her as his child. The family return to Kabul and use the money to repair the orphanage Aziza had stayed in, and Laila soon works there as a teacher. She becomes pregnant with her third child, whom she intends to name Mariam if it is a girl.

## Characters

### Major Characters

Mariam, an ethnic hazara born in Herat in 1959. The illegitimate child of Jalil and Nana, his housekeeper, she suffers shame throughout her life due to the circumstances of her birth, and is forced to marry a much older shoemaker and move to Kabul after her mother's death. Hosseini describes Mariam as "isolated in every sense of the word. She is a woman who is detached from the day-to-day norms of human existence. Really, she just wants a connection with another human being". Despite initially resenting Laila, she becomes a "friend and a doting alternative mother" to her through the "common hardship" of being married to the "abusive, psychologically imposing" Rasheed. Mariam kills Rasheed while defending Laila, for which she is publicly executed by the Taliban.

Laila, whose ethnicity is not stated, born in Kabul in 1978. The only surviving child of Hakim and Fariba after her older brothers die in the Afghan-Soviet War, she is raised by educated parents who educate her, first at school and later at home when Kabul becomes too dangerous. Compared to Mariam, Hosseini noted she "had a much more fulfilling relationship with her father, her [girlfriends] and her childhood friend, Tariq. She expected to finish school and is looking for personal fulfillment. These are two very different representations of women". Laila's life becomes tied with Mariam's when she is forced to marry Rasheed in order to protect herself and her unborn child after the death of her parents and supposed death of Tariq. This initially causes resentment from Mariam, who "[feels] her territory infringed upon". Despite this, "Laila becomes her daughter for all practical purposes" on account of the struggles and abuse they both experience during their marriage. At the end of the novel, Laila returns to Kabul and becomes a schoolteacher at an orphanage.

Rasheed, an ethnic Pashtun from Kabul who works as a shoemaker. During his first marriage, Rasheed sired a son who died to drowning; it is suggested in the novel that this happened as a result of Rasheed being drunk while caring for him. Rasheed is deeply misogynistic, often subjecting his wives and 'daughter' Aziza to frequent physical, mental and emotional abuse. In spite of his horrific behavior toward women, Rasheed shows genuine love toward his son Zalmai, whom he dotes greatly. After suffering years of experiencing domestic abuse, Mariam bludgeons Rasheed to death with a shovel while he attempts to strangle Laila to death. Hosseini hoped to make a multi-layered character with Rasheed, noting "Rasheed's the embodiment of the patriarchal, tribal character. In writing him, I didn't want to write him as an irredeemable villain. He is a reprehensible person, but there are moments of humanity, such as his love for his son. Hosseini identified an encounter with an Afghan man who "had a very sweet, subservient wife" and had not yet informed her that he was planning to marry again" as an inspiration for the character.

- Tariq, an ethnic Pashtun born in Kabul in 1976 who grew up with Laila. He lost a leg to a landmine at the age of five. He and Laila evolve from close friends to lovers shortly before he flees Kabul with his family. As a refugee in Pakistan, Tariq suffers many tragedies: his father passes away from illness in the refugee camps, and Tariq ends up with a seven year prison sentence for inadvertently participating in drug trafficking. While imprisoned, Tariq's mother dies of exposure. After being freed from prison Tariq gains stable employment from a relative of a prisoner he befriended. Soon after gaining stable employment, Tariq reunites with Laila in Kabul. After Rasheed's death, Tariq and Laila leave for Pakistan and marry. Following the fall of the Taliban Tariq returns to Kabul with Laila, expecting to have a third child.

### **Supporting Characters**

- Nana, an ethnic Hazara from a village outside Herat. Initially betrothed to a local boy in her village, Nana's life trajectory greatly changes after "the jinn enters her body" shortly before marriage, causing her to have a seizure. The incident leaves her unmarriageable, and she eventually becomes a house servant for Jalil. She has an affair with Jalil, leading to the birth of her daughter Mariam. The scandal of the affair brings dishonour upon Jalil's wives and legitimate children, causing him to remove Nana and Mariam from his household and relocate them. This treatment causes Nana to become deeply bitter toward Jalil and his family. Embittered by the tragedies of her life, Nana often mentally and emotionally abuses Mariam, blaming her for her life's misfortune. After Mariam leaves the family home for the first time on her own to find Jalil on her fifteenth birthday, Nana hangs herself, believing that Mariam abandoned her.
- Mullah Faizullah, a local Sufi imam who teaches Mariam the Qur'an and supports her and Nana. He is one of the few people in Mariam's life who brings her comfort and joy, though they lose contact after Mariam is forced to marry Rasheed and move to Kabul. He dies of natural causes in 1989.

- Jalil, a local businessman in Herat who has three wives and nine (later ten) legitimate children, in addition to Mariam. While doting on Mariam, Jalil's reluctance to treat her like his legitimate children ultimately brings the both of them tragedy: his actions indirectly cause Mariam to lose her mother, and his decision to send Mariam away creates a permanent schism between the two that is never resolved. Before his death, he expresses deep regret for his treatment of Mariam, through a letter and various keepsakes that would have been given to her if she had ever returned to Herat. Mariam never receives these items; instead, Laila receives them in her stead after visiting Mariam's hometown.
- Hakim, Laila's father, a university educated man from Kabul, who works first as a teacher and then at a factory after the war. He is progressive and wishes for Laila to be educated and make her own decisions in life, going against traditional cultural values by urging Laila to prioritize her education over marriage. Initially in a loving marriage, Hakim's relationship with his wife Fariba sours after the loss of their sons and Hakim's lack of traditional masculinity. In spite of this, Hakim remains dedicated to Fariba, refusing to abandon her and leave Kabul even as many of their friends and neighbours do. He is killed in a rocket explosion alongside his wife Fariba, shortly after he manages to convince her to flee the city due to increasingly intense conflict
- Fariba, Laila's mother, she briefly meets Mariam when she first arrives in Kabul, and is depicted as a cheerful woman. Her disposition is permanently changed after her two sons, Ahmad and Noor, leave their home to fight and are later killed in the Afghan-Soviet war: Fariba becomes deeply depressed and obsessed with the loss of her sons. This obsession blots out her relationship with her husband, with whom she often fights and treats poorly, and her relationship with her daughter, whom she often neglects. Fariba's obsession with her deceased sons causes her and her remaining family to remain in Kabul long after many of their friends and neighbours flee from the constant danger in the city. She is later killed in a rocket explosion alongside her husband Hakim, shortly after he manages to convince her to flee the city due to increasingly intense conflict.
- Hasina, one of Laila's childhood friends. She has a close relationship with Laila, often teasing her. Hasina leaves Kabul after she is betrothed to one of her cousins, who plans on marrying her and moving them to Germany.
- Giti, one of Laila's childhood friends. She has a close relationship with Laila, with whom she feels comfortable gushing about boys to. Giti is killed when a stray rocket hits her, blowing her body into bits.
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## **Analysis**

### **Family**

When asked about common themes in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini replied:

"Both novels are multigenerational, and so the relationship between parent and child, with all of its manifest complexities and contradictions, is a prominent theme. I did not intend this, but I am keenly interested, it appears, in the way parents and children love, disappoint, and in the end honor each other. In one way, the two novels are corollaries: *The Kite Runner* was a father-son story, and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be seen as a mother-daughter story."

He considers both novels to be "love stories" in the sense love "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".

### **Women in Afghanistan**

Hosseini visited Afghanistan in 2003, and "heard so many stories about what happened to women, the tragedies that they had endured, the difficulties, the gender-based violence that they had suffered, the discrimination, the being barred from active life during the Taliban, having their movement restricted, being banned essentially from practicing their legal, social rights, political rights" This motivated him to write a novel centered on two Afghan women.

The Washington Post critic Jonathan Yardley suggested that "the central theme of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the place of women in Afghan society", pointing to a passage in which Mariam's mother states, "learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam."

In the book, both Mariam and Laila are forced into accepting marriage to Rasheed, who requires them to wear a burqa long before it is implemented by law under the Taliban. He later becomes increasingly abusive. A *Riverhead Trades Weekly* review states that the novel consistently shows the "patriarchal despotism where women are agonizingly dependent on fathers, husbands and especially sons, the bearing of male children being their sole path to social status."

### **Reception**

In the first week following its release, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* sold over one million copies, becoming a number-one New York Times bestseller for fifteen weeks. *Time* magazine's Lev Grossman placed it at number three in the Top 10 Fiction Books of 2007, and praised it as a "dense, rich, pressure-packed guide to enduring the unendurable."<sup>[20][21]</sup> Jonathan Yardley said in the *Washington Post* "Book World", "Just in case you're wondering whether Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is as good as *The Kite Runner*, here's the answer: No. It's better."

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* received significant praise from reviewers, with *Publishers Weekly* calling it "a powerful, harrowing depiction of Afghanistan" and *USA Today* describing the prose as "achingly beautiful".

Lisa See of *The New York Times* attributed the book's success to Hosseini "[understanding] the power of emotion as few other popular writers do". Natasha Walter from *The Guardian* wrote, "Hosseini is skilled at telling a certain kind of story, in which events that may seem unbearable—violence, misery and abuse—are made readable. He doesn't gloss over the horrors his characters live through, but something about his direct, explanatory style and the sense that you are moving towards a redemptive ending makes the whole narrative, for all its tragedies, slip down rather easily."

**A Thousand Splendid Suns** is a 2007 novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini, following the huge success of his bestselling 2003 debut *The Kite Runner*. Mariam, an illegitimate teenager from Herat, is forced to marry a shoemaker from Kabul after a family tragedy. Laila, born a generation later, lives a relatively privileged life, but her life intersects with Mariam's when a similar tragedy forces her to accept a marriage proposal from Mariam's husband.

Hosseini has remarked that he regards the novel as a "mother-daughter story" in contrast to *The Kite Runner*, which he considers a "father-son story". It continues some of the themes used in his previous work, such as familial dynamics, but instead focusing primarily on female characters and their roles in contemporary Afghan society.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* was released on May 22, 2007, and received favorable widespread critical acclaim from *Kirkus Reviews*, *Publishers Weekly*,<sup>1</sup> *Library Journal*, and *Booklist*, and became a number one New York Times Best Seller for fifteen weeks following its release. During its first week on sale, it sold over one million copies.<sup>[8]</sup> Columbia Pictures purchased film rights in 2007, and a theatrical adaptation of the book premiered on February 1, 2017, at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, California.

## Creation

### Title

The title of the book comes from a line in Josephine Davis' translation of the poem "Kabul", by the 17th-century Iranian poet Saib Tabrizi: "Every street of Kabul is entralling to the eye

Through the bazaars, caravans of Egypt pass  
One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs  
and the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls"  
Hosseini explained "I was searching for English translations of poems about Kabul, for use in a scene where a character bemoans leaving his beloved city, when I found this particular verse. I realized that I had found not only the right line for the scene, but also an evocative title in the phrase 'a thousand splendid suns,' which appears in the next-to-last stanza."

### Inspiration

When asked what led him to write a novel centred on two Afghan women, Hosseini responded:

"I had been entertaining the idea of writing a story of Afghan women for some time after I'd finished writing *The Kite Runner*. That first novel was a male-dominated story. All the major characters, except perhaps for Amir's wife Soraya, were men. There was a whole facet of Afghan society which I hadn't touched on in *The Kite Runner*, an entire landscape that I felt was fertile with story ideas...In the spring of 2003, I went to Kabul, and I recall seeing these burqa-clad women sitting at street corners, with four, five, six children, begging for change. I remember watching them walking in pairs up the street, trailed by their children in ragged clothes, and wondering how life had brought them to that point...I spoke to many of those women in Kabul. Their life stories were truly heartbreaking...When I began writing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, I found myself thinking about those resilient women over and over. Though no one woman that I met in Kabul inspired either Laila or Mariam, their voices, faces, and their incredible stories of survival were always with me, and a good part of my inspiration for this novel came from their collective spirit."

### Writing

"I hope the book offers emotional subtext to the image of the burqa-clad woman walking down a dusty street in Kabul."

Hosseini disclosed that in some ways, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was more difficult to write than his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. He noted the anticipation for his second book when writing it, compared to *The Kite Runner* wherein "no one was waiting for it." He also found his second novel to be more "ambitious" than the first due to its larger cast of characters; its dual focus on Mariam and Laila; and its

covering a multi-generational period of nearly forty-five years in total. However, he found the novel easier to write once he had begun, noting "as I began to write, as the story picked up the pace and I found myself immersed in the world of Mariam and Laila, these apprehensions vanished on their own. The developing story captured me and enabled me to tune out the background noise and get on with the business of inhabiting the world I was creating." The characters "took on a life of their own" at this point and "became very real for [him]".

Similar to *The Kite Runner*, the manuscript had to be extensively revised; with Hosseini ultimately rewriting the book five times before it was complete. The novel's anticipated release was first announced in October 2006, when it was described as a story about "family, friendship, faith and the salvation to be found in love".

## Plot

On the outskirts of Herat, Mariam lives with her embittered mother, Nana, in a secluded hut. Born as the result of an affair between her mother and Jalil, a wealthy local businessman, Mariam and her mother live outside the city in order to avoid confronting Jalil's legitimate family. Nana resents Jalil for his actions and deceptive attitude towards Mariam, whom he visits every Thursday. On Mariam's fifteenth birthday, Jalil does not show up to take her to see Pinocchio in town as promised. Against Nana's wishes, Mariam travels to Herat herself to find her father, and sleeps outside his house when told he is away, but later discovering he was home the entire time. Heartbroken, she returns home to find that Nana has committed suicide by hanging. Briefly moving into Jalil's house, Mariam is soon rushed into marriage with Rasheed, a widowed shoemaker from Kabul thirty years her senior, and moves to Kabul. Rasheed is initially courteous to Mariam, but over the course of seven miscarriages he becomes increasingly abusive toward her, angered by her inability to provide him a son. Years later, an ailing Jalil attempts to visit Mariam but she refuses to allow him inside.

Meanwhile, Mariam's young neighbour Laila grows up close to her schoolteacher father and is worried for her mother, who is deeply depressed following the death of her two sons fighting for the Mujahideen against the Soviets. Laila is close friends with Tariq, a local Pashtun boy with one leg, and romance develops between them as they grow up. When Laila is fourteen, civil war breaks out in Afghanistan, and Kabul is bombarded by frequent rocket attacks. Tariq's family decide to leave the city and, while saying their good-byes, he and Laila have sex in a moment of passion. Shortly after, a rocket hits Laila's home as they prepare to flee, killing her parents. She is taken in by Mariam and Rasheed, and as she recovers from her injuries, Rasheed begins courting her, to Mariam's dismay. A man arrives at Rasheed's home to inform Laila that Tariq and his family died in a bomb blast on their way to Pakistan. Realizing that she is pregnant with Tariq's child, Laila agrees to marry Rasheed, convincing Rasheed that the child is his. She gives birth to a daughter, whom she names Aziza.

The childless Mariam initially treats Laila coldly, avoiding contact with her and Aziza. They eventually become friends, forming a close mother-daughter-like bond, and support each other in enduring Rasheed's abuse and raising Aziza. They attempt to flee one day, but are caught by the local police and severely beaten and nearly starved by Rasheed as punishment.

Meanwhile, the Taliban rise to power in Kabul and impose harsh rules on the local population, severely curtailing women's rights. Laila is forced to give birth to a son, Zalmai, via caesarean section without anaesthesia in a deprived women's hospital. Laila and Mariam struggle with raising Zalmai, whom Rasheed dotes on and favors over Aziza. During a drought, Rasheed's workshop burns down, and he is forced to take other jobs, worsening his mood and abuse. Due to a lack of food,

Rasheed forces Laila to send Aziza to an orphanage and refuses to accompany her to visit Aziza. Laila endures beatings from the Taliban for travelling alone to visit Aziza.

One day, Tariq suddenly shows up on Laila's doorstep, much to her shock. Laila realizes that Rasheed had paid the man to lie to her about Tariq's death, so that she would stay in Kabul and marry him. Laila and Mariam plan to escape again, this time with Tariq's help. However, when Rasheed returns home from work, Zalmi informs his father Rasheed that Laila had a male visitor. Enraged, Rasheed reveals that he has suspected Aziza's true paternity all along and begins viciously beating the women and attempts to strangle Laila. To save Laila, Mariam kills Rasheed with a shovel. Knowing the Taliban would be after them, Mariam decides to turn herself in to draw attention away from Laila and Tariq's escape with the children. Confessing the murder to the Taliban, Mariam is sentenced to public execution. She complies peacefully, having found unexpected happiness and love in her years with Laila and the children.

Laila and Tariq successfully escape Afghanistan with the children and move east to Murree in the Pakistani Punjab, and they marry. After the fall of the Taliban, they return to Kabul to join the rebuilding of Afghan society. They stop en route to Herat, and Laila visits the village where Mariam was raised. She meets with the son of a kindly mullah who had taught Mariam, and he gives her a box Jalil had left for Mariam should she return to Herat. The box contains a videotape of Pinocchio, a sack of money, and a letter in which Jalil expresses his regret and love for Mariam, wishing he had fought for her and raised her as his child. The family return to Kabul and use the money to repair the orphanage Aziza had stayed in, and Laila soon works there as a teacher. She becomes pregnant with her third child, whom she intends to name Mariam if it is a girl.

## Characters

### Major Characters

**Mariam**, an ethnic hazara born in Herat in 1959. The illegitimate child of Jalil and Nana, his housekeeper, she suffers shame throughout her life due to the circumstances of her birth, and is forced to marry a much older shoemaker and move to Kabul after her mother's death. Hosseini describes Mariam as "isolated in every sense of the word. She is a woman who is detached from the day-to-day norms of human existence. Really, she just wants a connection with another human being". Despite initially resenting Laila, she becomes a "friend and a doting alternative mother" to her through the "common hardship" of being married to the "abusive, psychologically imposing" Rasheed. Mariam kills Rasheed while defending Laila, for which she is publicly executed by the Taliban.

**Laila**, whose ethnicity is not stated, born in Kabul in 1978. The only surviving child of Hakim and Fariba after her older brothers die in the Afghan-Soviet War, she is raised by educated parents who educate her, first at school and later at home when Kabul becomes too dangerous. Compared to Mariam, Hosseini noted she "had a much more fulfilling relationship with her father, her [girlfriends] and her childhood friend, Tariq. She expected to finish school and is looking for personal fulfillment. These are two very different representations of women".<sup>[15]</sup> Laila's life becomes tied with Mariam's when she is forced to marry Rasheed in order to protect herself and her unborn child after the death of her parents and supposed death of Tariq. This initially causes resentment from Mariam, who "[feels] her territory infringed upon".<sup>[15]</sup> Despite this, "Laila becomes her daughter for all practical purposes" on account of

the struggles and abuse they both experience during their marriage. At the end of the novel, Laila returns to Kabul and becomes a schoolteacher at an orphanage.

**Rasheed**, an ethnic Pashtun from Kabul who works as a shoemaker. During his first marriage, Rasheed sired a son who died to drowning; it is suggested in the novel that this happened as a result of Rasheed being drunk while caring for him. Rasheed is deeply misogynistic, often subjecting his wives and 'daughter' Aziza to frequent physical, mental and emotional abuse. In spite of his horrific behavior toward women, Rasheed shows genuine love toward his son Zalmai, whom he dotes greatly. After suffering years of experiencing domestic abuse, Mariam bludgeons Rasheed to death with a shovel while he attempts to strangle Laila to death. Hosseini hoped to make a multi-layered character with Rasheed, noting "Rasheed's the embodiment of the patriarchal, tribal character. In writing him, I didn't want to write him as an irredeemable villain. He is a reprehensible person, but there are moments of humanity, such as his love for his son." Hosseini identified an encounter with an Afghan man who "had a very sweet, subservient wife" and had not yet informed her that he was planning to marry again" as an inspiration for the character.

**Tariq**, an ethnic Pashtun born in Kabul in 1976 who grew up with Laila. He lost a leg to a landmine at the age of five. He and Laila evolve from close friends to lovers shortly before he flees Kabul with his family. As a refugee in Pakistan, Tariq suffers many tragedies: his father passes away from illness in the refugee camps, and Tariq ends up with a seven year prison sentence for inadvertently participating in drug trafficking. While imprisoned, Tariq's mother dies of exposure. After being freed from prison Tariq gains stable employment from a relative of a prisoner he befriended. Soon after gaining stable employment, Tariq reunites with Laila in Kabul. After Rasheed's death, Tariq and Laila leave for Pakistan and marry. Following the fall of the Taliban Tariq returns to Kabul with Laila, expecting to have a third child.

## Supporting Characters

**Nana**, an ethnic Hazara from a village outside Herat. Initially betrothed to a local boy in her village, Nana's life trajectory greatly changes after "the jinn enters her body" shortly before marriage, causing her to have a seizure. The incident leaves her unmarriageable, and she eventually becomes a house servant for Jalil. She has an affair with Jalil, leading to the birth of her daughter Mariam. The scandal of the affair brings dishonour upon Jalil's wives and legitimate children, causing him to remove Nana and Mariam from his household and relocate them. This treatment causes Nana to become deeply bitter toward Jalil and his family. Embittered by the tragedies of her life, Nana often mentally and emotionally abuses Mariam, blaming her for her life's misfortune. After Mariam leaves the family home for the first time on her own to find Jalil on her fifteenth birthday, Nana hangs herself, believing that Mariam abandoned her.

**Mullah Faizullah**, a local Sufi imam who teaches Mariam the Qur'an and supports her and Nana. He is one of the few people in Mariam's life who brings her comfort and joy, though they lose contact after Mariam is forced to marry Rasheed and move to Kabul. He dies of natural causes in 1989.

**Jalil**, a local businessman in Herat who has three wives and nine (later ten) legitimate children, in addition to Mariam. While doting on Mariam, Jalil's reluctance to treat her like his legitimate children ultimately brings the both of them tragedy: his actions indirectly cause Mariam to lose her mother, and his decision to send Mariam away creates a permanent schism between the two that is never resolved. Before his death, he expresses deep regret for his treatment of Mariam, through a letter and various

keepsakes that would have been given to her if she had ever returned to Herat. Mariam never receives these items; instead, Laila receives them in her stead after visiting Mariam's hometown.

**Hakim**, Laila's father, a university educated man from Kabul, who works first as a teacher and then at a factory after the war. He is progressive and wishes for Laila to be educated and make her own decisions in life, going against traditional cultural values by urging Laila to prioritize her education over marriage. Initially in a loving marriage, Hakim's relationship with his wife Fariba sours after the loss of their sons and Hakim's lack of traditional masculinity. In spite of this, Hakim remains dedicated to Fariba, refusing to abandon her and leave Kabul even as many of their friends and neighbours do. He is killed in a rocket explosion alongside his wife Fariba, shortly after he manages to convince her to flee the city due to increasingly intense conflict.

**Fariba**, Laila's mother, she briefly meets Mariam when she first arrives in Kabul, and is depicted as a cheerful woman. Her disposition is permanently changed after her two sons, Ahmad and Noor, leave their home to fight and are later killed in the Afghan-Soviet war: Fariba becomes deeply depressed and obsessed with the loss of her sons. This obsession blots out her relationship with her husband, with whom she often fights and treats poorly, and her relationship with her daughter, whom she often neglects. Fariba's obsession with her deceased sons causes her and her remaining family to remain in Kabul long after many of their friends and neighbours flee from the constant danger in the city. She is later killed in a rocket explosion alongside her husband Hakim, shortly after he manages to convince her to flee the city due to increasingly intense conflict.

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## **Analysis**

### **Family**

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Cathleen Medwick gave the novel a highly positive review in *O, the Oprah Magazine*:

"Love may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you consider the war-ravaged landscape of Afghanistan. But that is the emotion—subterranean, powerful, beautiful, illicit, and infinitely patient—that suffuses the pages of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. As in his best-selling first

novel, *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini movingly examines the connections between unlikely friends, the fissures that open up between parents and children, the intransigence of quiet hearts."

The New York Times writer Michiko Kakutani wrote a more critical review, describing the opening as "heavy-handed" and early events in the novel as "soap-opera-ish". Despite these objections, she concluded, "Gradually, however, Mr. Hosseini's instinctive storytelling skills take over, mowing down the reader's objections through sheer momentum and will. He succeeds in making the emotional reality of Mariam and Laila's lives tangible to us, and by conjuring their day-to-day routines, he is able to give us a sense of what daily life was like in Kabul—both before and during the harsh reign of the Taliban." Similarly, Yvonne Zipp of *The Christian Science Monitor* concluded that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was ultimately "a little shaky as a work of literature".

The depictions of the lead female characters, Mariam and Laila, were praised by several commentators. John Freeman from *The Houston Chronicle* found them "enormously winning" while Carol Memmott from *USA Today* further described them as "stunningly heroic characters whose spirits somehow grasp the dimmest rays of hope". Medwick summed up the portrayals: "Mariam, branded as a harami, or bastard, and forced into an abusive marriage at the age of fifteen, and Laila, a beauty groomed for success but shrouded almost beyond recognition by repressive sharia law and the husband she and Mariam share. The story, epic in scope and spanning three decades, follows these two indomitable women whose fortunes mirror those of their beloved and battered country—'nothing pretty to look at, but still standing'—and who find in each other the strength they need to survive."

Jennifer Reese from *Entertainment Weekly* dubbed Rasheed "one of the most repulsive males in recent literature". Lisa See wrote that, with the exception of Tariq, "the male characters seem either unrelentingly evil or pathetically weak" and opined, "If a woman wrote these things about her male characters, she would probably be labeled a man-hater."

On November 5, 2019, the BBC News listed *A Thousand Splendid Suns* on its list of the 100 most inspiring novels.

## **Adaptations**

Columbia Pictures owns the movie rights to the novel. Steven Zaillian finished writing the first draft of the screenplay in 2009 and was also slated to direct; Scott Rudin had signed on as a producer. In May 2013, studios confirmed a tentative release date of 2015, although as of 2022 the film remains unproduced.

The first theatrical adaptation of the novel premiered in San Francisco, California, on February 1, 2017. It is co-produced by the American Conservatory Theater and Theatre Calgary. The theatrical adaptation condenses the novel for length, beginning with the deaths of Hakim and Fariba and telling earlier sections (such as Mariam's childhood and Laila and Tariq's romance) through flashbacks.

A television limited series adaptation of the novel is in works by One Community.