

Selfless Sacrifice in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*

Author:

Judewin Paul S

Research Scholar,

Reg No: 20113114011037,

Department of English,

Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam.

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli.

Mail ID: judewinpaul@gmail.com

Contact number: 9442278908

Dr. G. Anne Nithiya,

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam.

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli.

Abstract:

This paper entitled "Selfless Sacrifice in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*" attempts to bring out the sacrifices of the Afghans in Afghanistan. Afghan people have experienced war and violence throughout their history. Though they experience trauma due to war, they sacrifice themselves for the betterment of their family members. In *And the Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini portrays the motherly sacrifice of Mariam for the bright future of Laila. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini describes the brotherly sacrifice of Hassan for the happy life of his half-brother Amir. Hosseini also pictures the selfless sacrifice of the Afghans living in a war-torn country.

Keywords: Sacrifice, war, violence, family, relationship.

Sacrifice is the ultimate expression of love. Sacrifice is an important element in the works of Khaled Hosseini. It is a habit of giving up precious things for the happiness of others. Myths and epics depict sacrifice as an exceptional quality in humans. Sacrifice determines the value of love. "The theories of Frazer and Freud grew out of, and in turn fed, a nineteenth- and twentieth-century fascination with human sacrifice as a, or even the, fundamental human experience" (Eberhart 6). Sacrifice cannot be forced as it requires intense love to commit.

Khaled Hosseini presents the theme of sacrifice in his notable works namely *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*. He introduces two characters namely Mariam, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and Hassan, in *The Kite Runner* to show the value of sacrifice. Khaled Hosseini also describes the sacrifices of the Afghans and their tragic life due to war.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Mariam, born out of wedlock sacrifices her life for the happiness of her father Jalil. After the demise of her mother Nana, Jalil and his wives wish to keep Mariam out of their home. Jalil and his family consider Mariam a burden. So, they arrange her marriage to an elderly man Rasheed when Mariam is just fifteen. Mariam opposes her marriage with Rasheed. Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* describes the agony of Mariam thus: "I don't want to," Mariam said. She looked at Jalil. "I don't want this. Don't make me." She hated the sniffling, pleading tone of her voice but could not help it" (47). Later Mariam sacrifices her life and marries Rasheed for the happiness of her father Jalil. After marriage, Mariam has a tough time with Rasheed as the couple is childless. Mariam searches for a purpose in her life.

Mariam prioritizes the happiness of her husband Rasheed. Though Mariam hates sharing her position as a wife with Laila, she convinces Laila to marry her husband Rasheed for her husband's happiness. She asks for Laila's permission to marry Rasheed: "He wants an answer by this morning," (ATSS210). Laila is helpless as she loses her parents and brothers in the war. She needs a safe place to escape the chaos caused by the war and she agrees to marry Rasheed.

Later, Mariam sacrifices herself for the happy future of Laila with her lover Tariq. Mariam loves Laila like her own daughter. A mother's sacrifice has no boundaries. A mother takes care of the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of the child. Her love and affection towards a child makes her risk her life for her child. Mariam desires to become a mother through Rasheed, but she loses her baby due to a miscarriage. The miscarriage of the baby creates a vacuum in her life and makes her feel frustrated.

Laila's parents die in a war. She yearns for the love of a mother and Mariam longs for the love of a child. After their marriage to Rasheed, Laila and Mariam have a strange relationship. As days pass by, Mariam and Laila develop another and daughter relationship. Though Mariam is not the biological mother of Laila, she loves Laila like her own child. Mariam takes care of Laila during her pregnancy. As Mariam longs for love, Laila provides a ray of hope to Mariam with her motherly love and affection. Laila too loves Mariam like a mother after the death of her biological mother Fariba. The physical and psychological torture of Rasheed, strengthens the bond between Mariam and Laila. Mariam's world revolves around Aziza, Zalmai and Laila. She serves as a guardian to Laila's children Aziza and Zalmai. When Rasheed assaults Laila, Mariam kills Rasheed. Mariam readily sacrifices her life for Laila as she is the only source of love and affection to her. Mariam describes the love and affection she receives from Laila and her children thus: "For me, it ends here. There's nothing more I want. Everything I'd ever wished for as a little girl you've already given me. You and your children have made me so very happy. It's all right, Laila jo. This is all right. Don't be sad" (350). Mariam misses parental and marital love in her life. Laila's love brings meaning to Mariam's life. Mariam's motherly love prompts her to end her own life in the hands of the Taliban as a penalty for Rasheed's murder. Mariam cannot tolerate the physical pain of Laila in Rasheed's hand, so she kills Rasheed. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini describes the sacrifice of a mother through Mariam.

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini describes the sacrifice of a brother through the character of Hassan. Sacrificial love makes the bond between siblings stronger. It seems to develop from childhood. The strong love bond between siblings motivates them to be sacrificial.

Hassan is Baba's child born out of wedlock. Baba, presents Hassan to the world as his servant to maintain his honour. Hassan does not know that he is the son of Baba until his death. Hassan considers himself a servant in Baba's house, but he develops brotherly love for Baba's legal son Amir without knowing that he is his half-brother. Hassan has the ability to read the mind of Amir. During the Afghan-Soviet war, Hassan was left in Afghanistan. Baba and Amir migrate to America to save their lives. Amir has no idea that Hassan is his brother until his meeting with Baba's partner Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan unveils the truth to Amir that Hassan is his brother. But it is already too late because by the time Amir comes to know about Hassan's real identity, Hassan is shot dead by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Amir longs for the approval of Baba that he is worthy to be his son. The kite fighting tournament sets a way for him. In the kite fighting tournament, one who cuts and brings the last opponent's kite in his hand is considered a winner. Amir cuts the last opponent's kite with his kite and Hassan runs fast to pick up Amir's opponent's kite to register Amir's victory. Hassan sees the opponent's kite in the hands of Amir's personal rival Assef. Assef wants to take revenge on Amir and Hassan. For the price of Amir's opponent's kite, which he considers a token to win Baba's heart, Assef demands Hassan to surrender himself without a fight. To get Baba's love for Amir as a kite-fighting winner, Hassan surrenders himself to Assef. Assef assaults Hassan in the midst of his comrades. But Amir does not rescue Hassan. Instead of rescuing Hassan, he hides himself. Amir describes Hassan's sacrifice as, "Hassan knew. He knew I'd seen everything in that alley, that I'd stood there and done nothing. He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again" (TKR 98). Hassan endures the pain so that Amir can gain Baba's love and acceptance.

Amir's unwillingness to rescue Hassan from Assef, develops a guilty feel in him. Due to guilt, Amir wishes to get rid of Hassan from his house. Amir plans to frame Hassan as a thief. Amir places his watch in Hassan's room and accuses him of theft to Baba. Hassan knows that Amir is betraying him for the second time. But Hassan did not say a word against Amir's accusation. As Hassan can read the mind of Amir, he knows Amir is accusing him due to guilt. Innocent Hassan accepts Amir's accusation and leaves Baba's house. Amir describes Hassan's sacrifice as "This was Hassan's final sacrifice for me" (98). In the midst of his betrayal, he analyzes the sacrifice of Hassan

as “I wasn’t worthy of this sacrifice; I was a liar, a cheat and a thief” (98). Though Amir betrays Hassan, his sacrifice makes Amir realize his cold-heartedness towards Hassan.

Hassan sacrifices his life in order to protect Baba’s house. Taliban try to seize Baba’s house. Hassan’s wife Farzana and his son Sohrab become the caretakers of Baba’s house after Baba and Amir settle in America. As Hassan loves the house of Baba, he raises his voice against the Taliban’s actions. The tragic consequence is that the Taliban killed Hassan and his wife Farzana. Rahim Khan describes the death of Hassan and his wife Farzana thus:

Hassan protested. But my neighbor said the Talibs were looking at the big house like- how did he say it?- yes, like ‘wolves looking at the big flock of sheep.’ They told Hassan they would be moving in to supposedly keep it safe until I return. Hassan protested again. So they took him to the street-”

“No,” I breathed.

“-and order him to kneel-”

“No. God, no.”

“- and shot him in the back of the head.”

“No.”

“-Farzana came screaming and attacked them-”

“No.”

“-shot her too. Self- defense, they claimed later-” (202, 203).

Hassan puts Baba and Amir before him and his family. He sacrifices his life and his wife is also shot to death by the Taliban. When it comes to sacrifice, Hassan cares more about Amir. He willingly sacrifices his life for Amir’s happiness. From birth till his last breath, Hassan does not stand against Amir’s will. Hassan’s selfless sacrifice enlightens Amir.

Though Mariam and Hassan are illegitimate children, both sacrifice their lives for the people whom they love the most. “Sacrifice is difficult and painful, but it is the highest form of giving” (Helin and Lindstrom 416). Hosseini portrays motherly sacrifice through Mariam and brotherly sacrifice through Hassan.

Hosseini, in his works, describes the sacrifice of Afghanistan people. War is a continuous term used in Afghanistan soil. Several kings, presidents, and organizations wage war on Afghanistan’s soil which affects the lives of its people. The Taliban’s show of power through war also devastates the lives of innocent Afghans. The Afghans suffer physically and psychologically due to war. But their love for the land remains the same. Most people lose their lives in war as an act of sacrifice. And others migrate to countries such as Pakistan and America as refugees, in order to save their lives. In Pakistan, the Afghan people suffer in refugee camps.

Khaled Hosseini in his works *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* handles the element of selfless sacrifice in an extraordinary manner. Though there are various elements in the novel, Hosseini pictures the sacrifice of Mariam and Hassan through their action of sacrificing their precious lives for Laila and Amir respectively. Sketching the characters of Mariam and Hassan, Hosseini presents selfless sacrifice, as the predominant theme of his novels.

Works Cited:

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007. Print.

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003. Print.

References:

Eberhart, Christian A. ed. *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.

Helin, Kaija, and Unni Å Lindstrom. “Sacrifice: An Ethical Dimension of Caring that Makes Suffering Meaningful.” *Nursing Ethics*, Vol.10, No. 4, August 2003.

<https://doi.org/10.1191/0969733003ne622oa>. Accessed 10 February 2022.