

A thousand splendid sun's essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The driver who takes Babi, Laila, and Tariq to the giant stone Buddhas above the Bamiyan Valley describes the crumbling fortress of Shahr-e-Zohak as “the story of our country, one invader after another... we’re like those walls up there. Battered, and nothing pretty to look at, but still standing.” Discuss the metaphorical importance of this passage as it relates to Mariam and Laila. In what ways does their story reflect the larger story of Afghanistan’s troubled history?

In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Khalid Hosseini highlights the escalating conflicts in the Middle East and the fates of two Afghani women by highlighting their lives from childhood to death. The main characters Mariam and Laila, are two women that have to endure horrible obstacles throughout the novel such as being forced into marriage, hope for acceptance, love, death, and the search for a better life. Hosseini uses imagery and metaphors to show on a deeper level the struggles of not only Mariam and Laila’s life but also Afghani women’s life in general.

Despite the struggles Mariam and Laila continue to endure throughout their life, they have to stay strong and Hosseini uses very important metaphors to describe this. In one passage, Hosseini describes the giant stone Buddhas above the Bamiyan Valley, “the story of our country, one invader after another... we’re like those walls up there. Battered, and nothing pretty to look at, but still standing,” (146) this passage is very symbolic because it not only describes the backdrop of war and danger in Afghanistan but it is also symbolic of Mariam and Laila’s life and struggles.

The main character, Mariam, has been through much more than other children her age and from the very beginning of her life she is treated differently because she is a harami, also known as an illegitimate child. Mariam just wanted to be accepted like everyone else and because of this she searches for acceptance her whole life. Mariam felt loved by her father but even he didn't fully accept her out of fear of his wives and the social structures that frown upon illegitimate children. Mariam suffered her first real loss of life when she decided to go and see Jalil because he promised to take her to his cinema, however, he never showed up.

She decided to go and find him and Nana said she couldn't live without her but she went anyway and Nana hung herself from the weeping willow tree. Mariam was extremely sad and felt that she was the reason for her death and only being fifteen, Mariam was able to live with her father for the first time but this was short lived as Jalil is forced to arrange a marriage to get rid of Mariam so his wives are happy. Mariam doesn't have a choice in the matter and her father has already given Rasheed his answer and she would have to leave for Kabul at noon.

This was the point that Mariam wanted nothing else to do with her father and told him that she never wanted to see him again, “ No. No. Don't come. I wont see you. Don't you come. I don't want to hear from you. Ever. Ever. ” (55) Mariam's struggles didn't stop here and in fact they actually got much worse. After a short honeymoon stage Mariam comes to realize that Rasheed is very mean and demanding. Rasheed makes her wear a burka and she is not used to this and has many problems trying to walk because it is very thick and hard to see out of.

Mariam becomes pregnant and she is filled with a love that she had never felt before, “ How glorious it was to know that her love for it already dwarfed anything she had ever felt as a human being. ” (89) This feeling was shortly lived and at this point in the novel Mariam experiences her second true loss. Rasheed wanted to take Miriam to the hamam (bathhouse) and she had never been and this is when she miscarried. She recalled a statement Nana used to tell her, “ As a reminder of how women like us suffer, she'd say. How quietly we endure all that falls upon us.” (91)

It's memories like this and Nana's teachings that helps Mariam make it through her difficult times. Nana told her that there wouldn't be any shortage of things she would endure and she was right. Laila in contrast has a little bit different of a story but she as well had to endure many tragedies and loss. Laila wasn't a harami and she had both of her parents. Her life growing up was a lot less traumatic but she stood out because she had blonde hair and green eyes. Laila is also much prettier than Mariam and is able to go to school and get an education.

He father is a teacher and she has two brothers that she has never met because they left to join the jihad against the Soviets. At this point in the novel Hosseini shows how the war is escalating and this becomes more predominant in the proceeding chapters. The war has been going on for eight years and the Soviets were losing. Laila struggles to have a relationship with her mother, however, this is very difficult because her mother only talks about her brothers and really neglects her by not showing her affection.

Mammy has good and bad days but usually just bad ones.

She lies in bed all day and sometimes she won't even leave her room for many days at a time. Laila's best friend is Tariq and he is missing one of his legs from a land mine. As Laila and Tariq get older they actually become lovers and the war is moving closer to Kabul. Babi took Laila and Tariq to see their countries heritage by taking a day trip to The Red City called Shahr-e-Zohak. The city has stood the test of time one invader after another, "Macedonians. Sassanians. Arabs. Mongols. Now the Soviets. But we're like those walls up there. Battered, and nothing pretty to look at, but still standing." (146)

This reflects not only the story of Afghanistan's troubled history but really reflects Miriam and Laila's personal stories with the struggles they have had to endure. After this Laila begins to really experience loss and it began with the death of her friend Giti who was blown to pieces because of a bomb, "This was the first time that someone whom Laila had known, been close to, loved, had died. " (178) Tariq's family decided to flee the country and he tried to get her to leave with him but she felt like she couldn't leave her family.

Only a few days after Tariq left she lost her parents to a bomb that hit their house the morning that they where going to flee the country so they would be safe. Laila was badly injured and this is when she first comes into contact with Miriam and Rasheed. She lost everyone that she knew except she had a part of Tariq inside here because she was pregnant. In the next part of the novel Mariam and Laila have to endure even more struggles as Laila was forced to become Rasheed's second wife, which caused a lot of problems between her and Mariam.

Laila didn't have a choice as she was pregnant and if she didn't marry and lay with Rasheed he would become suspicious about her pregnancy. Mariam and Laila struggle to get along but eventually they find common ground and become close to one another and plan to run away from Rasheed. A man who helped them purchase a train ticket turned them into the authorities and they were returned back to Rasheed. He locked Laila in her room and Mariam in the tool shed. They were kept locked up for three days and were not given any food or water as their punishment.

Laila struggles with her second pregnancy because she has to go to an all female hospital that doesn't have adequate supplies and has to give birth without any anesthesia. As the years go by, Laila is forced to place Aziza in an orphanage because Rasheed cannot support all of them since his clothing shop burned down and he can't even keep a restaurant job because of his anger and bad temper. Tariq returns to Kabul and finds Laila and Rasheed knows who he is and is furious. He begins to attack Laila and Mariam and he was trying to kill them. Mariam had no choice and hit Rasheed over the head with a shovel and killed him.

She decided to be strong and endure her punishment so Laila, Aziza, and Zalmai would be safe. Mariam is sentenced to death and has no regrets, she just wished for more life so she could watch Aziza grow up. In keeping with the theme of the novel, Hosseini shows the life long struggle of two very courageous women who have to endure so much pain, heartache, abuse, while being a woman in a patriarchal society in war torn Afghanistan. There are many ways that this story highlights and reflects the larger story of Afghanistan's troubled history.

Women in Afghanistan did not have many rights when Mariam was growing up and they still don't. Mariam finally took a stand for what she thought was the right thing to do and was tired of suffering by the end of the novel.

Hosseini shows the way women are treated and how these two women changed the course of their life by finally standing up to Rasheed. By the end of the novel Mariam is battered and she was nothing pretty to look at just like the troubled history of Afghanistan and the crumbling fortress of Shahr-e-Zohak but she was still standing tall and enduring what she had been dealt, " Women like us.

We endure. It's all we have. " (19) Laila ended up getting the better lot in life because she finally had the family and love that she wanted all along but it came at a major price and only after enduring many years of heartache, pain and loss. If she didn't endure all of this she wouldn't have gotten her family in the end. Hosseini makes this point very clear and this story just proves why we must all go on and endure the best we can so hopefully we find a better and brighter place just on the other side.