

## **Merit of English Section**

### **Senior Division**

**Name of Winner : Kanak Khanuja**

**Name of School : HKMA David Li Kwok Po**

**College**

**Book Title : A Thousand Splendid Suns**

**Author : Khaled Hosseini**

**Publisher : Bloomsbury Publishing**

Words cannot begin to express the love I have for Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns. Hosseini's poignant and inspiring writing style had me hooked on the book till the very end. His profound storytelling abilities made me feel as if I personally knew the two main characters, Mariam and Laila as I cheered, ached, and grieved for them throughout the book. A Thousand Splendid Suns sent me on a rollercoaster of emotions, it retaught me what it means to love, sacrifice and

stand in the face of adversity. At times, flipping to the next page was almost unbearable knowing the atrocities that were to ensue, reading it felt like simultaneously being ripped apart and being remade. It feels so fulfilling to have read something so potent and representative of the hardships that tormented so many during the political turmoil of 1960 Afghanistan.

The book comprises themes such as love, sacrifice and resilience. It is set during the 1960s to the early 2000s primarily in different parts of Afghanistan such as Herat and Kabul but also briefly shifts to Murree, Pakistan. The setting paints a vivid picture of the deleterious implications of a political pandemonium on ordinary people and the strength required to overcome such unimaginable circumstances.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a heart wrenching story about the lives of 2 Afghan women during the tumultuous period of

the Taliban's regime. Throughout the story, Hosseini skillfully weaves together the personal struggles of the characters with the backdrop of historical events, such as the Soviet invasion, the civil war, and the rise of the Taliban. Part one follows the life of the illegitimate child of one of Herat's most illustrious businessmen, Jalil Khan. Mariam lives with her disparaging mother in a beaten down shack in the outskirts of Herat.

Throughout her youth, Mariam yearns for her father's love and acceptance, who only visits her once a week in secret for fear of losing face. In a bout of desperation to be with her father, Mariam travels on foot to Jalil's home in Herat, neglecting her mother's pleas to not do so. During her short time there, she realises the extent of Jalil's embarrassment of her. Already dejected by the harsh truth of her father's unacceptance of her, Mariam's fate is sealed by turmoil when she returns home to find that her mother had taken her life.

Within the week, Mariam, 15, is sent to marry Rasheed, an

abusive, multifaceted old widower whose presence in Mariam's life goes on to be the culmination of everything good, bad and downright horrible to occur in the remaining span of her life.

As the narrative progresses, the focus shifts to Laila, a young girl growing up in Kabul. Laila grows up alongside her childhood friend, later her lover Tariq. Tariq and Laila's love story was obvious to all but them for the longest time, many stolen glances and shy smiles later the two became even more inseparable in the face of political upheaval and violence than ever before. Unfortunately for the pair, Tariq has to escape Afghanistan with his ailing parents, especially his father, whose heart could no longer sustain the burdens of war. Tariq beseeches Laila to run away with and marry him. As much as she desperately wants to, Laila knew that she was all her father had after given her mother's resentment towards him.

Their love could not prevail in the face of the devotion Laila had for her father, so the pair was separated. Laila's life was also tainted by the death of her brothers who'd gone off to fight in the war after being sent by their father. It is the misfortune that plagued their mother with profound grief and unadulterated anger towards their father. More tragedy befalls when both of Laila's parents die in a rocket attack, leaving her badly injured, vulnerable and alone. Taking advantage of her sorry state, Rasheed marries Laila after deceiving her by paying someone to tell her that Tariq died. Laila also takes advantage of these circumstances to pass her unborn child for Rasheed's.

Laila's life takes a drastic turn when she becomes entwined with Mariam's story, leading to an unexpected bond between the two women. Initially, their relationship is marked by tension and rivalry, but eventually, they find solace and

comfort in each other's company, their dreams, and their unwavering love for their children, causing an unlikely yet significant friendship which is almost familial to bloom between the two women. As they endure Rasheed's abuse, their friendship deepens, providing them with the strength to face their shared struggles.

Nearing the end of the book, Mariam and Laila finally seek retribution for all they've had to endure at the hands of Rasheed and kill him. They make plans for a hurried departure from Afghanistan but Mariam knows that if someone were to find out that two women were on the run, their husband nowhere to be found, someone was bound to raise suspicion. So, she turns herself in to the Taliban in order to save Laila, Tariq and their children, giving them a chance to experience life without the oppression, suffering and grief they were so familiar with. Mariam faces death by execution as she is made

a spectacle to warn others of what happens when one acts out against what is socially acceptable.

Hosseini's masterfully executed writing had me sobbing my heart out at 2 am owing to the death of my most beloved character in the book, Mariam. "No. It was not so bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way. Not so bad.

This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings."

It absolutely broke me to think that Mariam had to reassure herself in her final moments that she was a person of consequence. It made me reflect upon everything that she'd endured in her entire life as I read her final thoughts. Life had not been kind to her, she wasn't blessed day after day with rays of sunshine still she prospered and persisted as the most beautiful rose amongst a garden of thorns. Till the very end she was a mountain of resilience against misfortune, her

indomitable spirit is a thousand times stronger than any wound Rasheed or anyone else could ever inflict upon her.

Through his proficient writing, Khaled Hosseini sheds light on the adversities faced by women during the Taliban's regime and highlights the importance of solidarity and companionship in overcoming misfortune. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* serves as a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit and is a beautifully crafted narrative that will be etched in my brain for the rest of my life. This book will forever and always be my favourite work of literature, it is safe to say there is a permanent “*A Thousand Splendid Suns*” shaped hole carved into my heart.