

**Transcript****Arts, Literature and Music****A Good Read - 04**

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A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini

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I have chosen to read and review *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, by Khaled Hosseini. The author, Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. His father was a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and History at a large high school in Kabul. In 1976 Afghan Foreign Ministry relocated the family to Paris. In September of 1980, Hosseini's family were granted political asylum and moved to San Jose, California.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is set totally in the real world of Afghanistan. It portrays the life of two women in two very different situations at an unforgiving time. I think Hosseini uses his own background to create very visual images of Kabul and Afghanistan and I found myself totally transported. I enjoy overseas travel and having recently returned from a trip to Central Asia, I thought I had an understanding of culture and lifestyles in countries previously under Soviet control but this novel left me disbelieving and outraged.

The story has four sections. The story begins with Mariam, then later switches to Laila's story. Eventually their stories combine until events leave us only with Laila.

Kahled Hosseini paints a picture of a society where women are totally dependent on men, with the ability to bear male children being their only path to social status.

I was at first angry with Mariam's mother. She had a very bitter attitude to her lot in life and placed tough restrictions on Mariam but by the end of the book I began to understand why she behaved this way. I found myself totally involved with Mariam, the heartbreaking and intimate look at her life, loves and her travels down the road of humiliation and servitude.

In what is a common occurrence for Afghan girls, who have traditionally been nothing more than a unit of exchange between men, Mariam is married off to a man she has never met, a "suitable" man chosen by her father. When she fails to provide sons, Rasheed starts beating her at the slightest excuse and treating her as a slave in his home.

In the second part of the story, Laila's father, a university lecturer who has lost his job, tells his teenage daughter that the Russian invasion has at least initiated a new and better regime for the next generation of Afghan women.

Laila's brothers become martyrs in the fight to liberate their country. Laila is injured by a bomb blast that kills her parents, pregnant by her boyfriend who has already left Afghanistan, and I couldn't help myself despairing at what seemed to be her likely fate.

In the third part of the book, Mariam and Laila's situation seems bad enough when they first meet. It becomes far worse once the Taliban ride into Kabul with their proclamations banning women from work, education and public places. These two women share experiences such as being the victims of male lust, contempt and violence, and when Laila's daughter is born she becomes both the focus of their affection and their hope for a new generation.

This novel clearly demonstrated the way in which men such as Rasheed made welcome a regime that confirmed the power of men and I felt outrage at a world so foreign to the things I believe. I think we may have forgotten the horrors and puritanism of the Taliban since they were driven out of Afghanistan. I think the novel also demonstrates that a woman's love for her family can move her to violent and heroic acts of self-sacrifice to ensure their survival.

I recently read that Khaled Hosseini said he planned to "use his access to the media to give voice to victims of humanitarian crises and raise public awareness about matters relating to refugees". Readers will also gain a better understanding of the effects of what Hosseini calls the "cultural vandalism" of the Taliban, which shattered Afghanistan's arts and culture, and the devastating impacts of Shariah law on women's lives.

Peer pressure encouraged me to step outside my regular reading choices when I read Hosseini's first book, the Kite Runner, a story about friendship between two Afghan boys. I found this quite a compelling read and was quite pleased to be able to follow it up with A Thousand Splendid Suns. Although I half expected the story to be a continuation of this theme, I was surprised that it wasn't, but quickly became engrossed.

Personally, I loved this human story about family, friendships and the plight of women in Afghanistan. I don't think you need to be particularly concerned with humanitarian or global issues to enjoy the read as the book is written in a non-political way. By the end of the novel the residents of Kabul are picking themselves up again after the defeat of the Taliban and it leaves the reader with a sense of hope for the future.