

A Thousand Splendid Suns – Study Guide – Part I: (Spelling counts)

Background Information

Author: Basics about Khaled Hosseini

- 1) Born 1965, father-diplomat/mother-teacher in Kabul
- 2) Lived in Kabul, Tehran, Iran, Paris, France
- 3) Soviet Union Invaded Afghanistan and family granted political asylum in U.S. 1980
- 4) Lived in California and went to Santa Clara University – and University of California-San Diego School of Medicine - 1993
- 5) Wife, Roya + 2 kids – 2006 named U.S. goodwill envoy to UN Refugee Agency
- 6) *The Kite Runner* – Published 2003
- 7) *A Thousand Splendid Suns* – Published 2007

Historical Information: 1973-2002 (* are on test now)

- *1) July 1973: Daoud Khan (in bloodless coup) deposed King Zahir Shah's regime + became president of the Republic of Afghanistan
- *2) 1979-1980: Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan + installed puppet government, sparking opposition run by Mujahideen (freedom fighters/terrorists – depending on your view)
- 3) 1988-1989: Soviet troop withdrawal
- 4) 1992: Mujahideen remove Mohammad Najibullah's Soviet-backed government
- 5) 1993: Rival factions choose Burhanuddin Rabbani to be new president – descent into anarchy
- 6) 1996: Taliban, led by Mullah Muhammad Omar, seize control of Kabul – enforce strict interpretation of Islamic law, exile President Rabbani, + offer protection to Osama bin Laden.
- 7) 1999: Taliban take control of Mazar-i-Sharif – many Shi'a, especially Hazaras, killed
- 8) September 11, 2001: Terrorists, under Osama Bin Laden's leadership, attack the U.S.
- 9) December 2001: The U.S. + allies helped Afghan rebels force Taliban from power.
- 10) 2002: Hamid Karzai becomes (interim) president of Afghanistan, + U.S. places about 12,000 troops in Afghanistan

Mujahideen: (Arabic: "strugglers" or "people doing jihad") a term that Muslims use to describe those they see as Muslims who struggle in the path of Allah. From same Arabic root as jihad ("struggle"). Recently, Mujahideen most closely associated by the west with radical Islam, encompassing several militant groups and struggles.

Characters

Mariam:

Jalil:

Nana:

Rasheed:

Mullah Faizullah:

Fariba (Mammy):

Hakim (Babi):

Laila:

Tariq:

Islam: founded by Prophet Mohammed in 7th century. Two branches: Sunni (90%) + Shi'a. Diverged in 632 due to differences over who should lead Muslim community. Still fighting about it.

Ethnic Populations:

Hazaras: Afghan ethnic group considered lower class – speak Farsi + mostly Shi'a

Pashtuns: Afghan ethnic group considered upper class – speak Pashto + mostly Sunni

Farsi: most common language spoken in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, + Pakistan

Important Locations:

Herat + outskirts: Herat is city rich in arts + culture. Countryside where Mariam + Nana live (fictional village of Gul Daman)

Kabul: capital of Afghanistan; constantly caught in political conflicts; Mariam lives in Kabul with Rasheed; Laila lives there with her parents.

Themes: Part I initiates several themes that center around treatment of women and relationships and the conflict of war. You should be able to pinpoint events that produce the following recurring motifs:

- 1) hardship and sacrifice; endurance
- 2) acceptance of grief and disappointment
- 3) discrimination and male control
- 4) survival (within abusive relationship)
- 5) importance of family
- 6) definition of morality

Plot: You must be familiar with the major events that occurred in Part I and be able to discuss characters with regard to traits and motivations. Basic character development, such as **how** Mariam goes from insecure, but hopeful child to submissive, traumatized and thoroughly disillusioned wife is significant.

The meaningful quotations such as the one Nana pronounces concerning the “accusing finger of man” foreshadow Mariam’s future and indicate thematic development as well.

Format: Multiple Choice – one essay question.