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And the Mountains Echoed: A Tale of Sibling Love and Hope

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Abstract:

Khaled Hosseini is one of the most recognized and bestselling authors across the world. His first three novels have been published in more than seventy countries and sold more than 40 million copies worldwide so far. After successfully portraying the male and female world, Hosseini turned to exploring sibling relationship in his more expansive and ambitious third novel *And the Mountains Echoed*. The novel centers on the strong bond between siblings: ten-year-old Abdullah and his three-year-old sister Pari and their father's decision to sell her to an affluent childless couple in Kabul. The present paper aims at studying and analyzing the themes of love between siblings, a wonderful friendship exists between them and hope depicted by Khaled Hosseini in his third novel. This in-depth study explores Abdullah's immaculate love for his sister, Pari; their painful separation and ultimate reunion and the other themes portrayed in the novel.

Keywords: Sibling, Love, Friendship, Redemption, Sacrifice, Human Relationship, Reunion.

Introduction:

And the Mountains Echoed, a beautifully written and masterfully crafted third book by Afghan-American novelist and humanitarian author Khaled Hosseini was published in 2013. The title of this novel comes from 'The Nurse's Song' a lovely poem by William Blake, in which he ends a verse with the line, "And all the hills echoed." In 2007, Hosseini had been on a short tour to Afghanistan. During the trip, he heard

from the localites, the stories about the deaths of young and underprivileged children during the winters from several village elders. Hence parents started selling their children to the affluent families to prevent this from happening. That was the only choice they had and this pathetic situation became the theme of his third novel. Hosseini had planned to write the novel in a linear fashion like his previous novels but during the writing process, he had to extend it in order to cover a series of interrelated stories of several characters that are not directly related to each other. During his 2009 trip to Afghanistan as Goodwill Envoy for UNHCR, Hosseini met a pair of blonde haired, blue eyed and fair skinned siblings in a secluded region of the country. He recalled this pair of sibling while creating Abdullah and Pari.

Plot Structure of the Novel:

The novel '*And the Mountains Echoed*' comprises of nine chapters and each chapter is narrated from the perspective of a different character. These nine chapters the novel are divided into nine different stories, independent of each other and narrated by different characters. One chapter is written in the form of a letter and is called as epistolary while the rest of the chapters are either written in the first person or in the third person.

Hosseini's Novels: A Study in Human Relations:

All the three novels of Hosseini are studies in human relations. They are not stories of Super Heroes and Super Heroines, but heart-breaking

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tales of ordinary men and women trying to better their lot in life. They are stories of their struggles, their friendships and loyalties, their betrayal and sense of guilt, their joys and sorrows, their desires and aspirations, their despair and frustration, their sacrifices, their attempts for salvation and redemption, and the hope of a better and brighter tomorrow. All three of Hosseini's novels are bildungsroman i.e. novels tracing the spiritual, moral, psychological or social development and growth of the main characters, usually from childhood to maturity.

Sibling Love, Care Bond and Hope :

Abdullah and Pari's story brings forth the harsh reality that many impoverished Afghan families face during the harsh winters, that is, of seeing their children die of cold and hunger, and a parent's difficult choice of preventing this from happening. Saboor, an impoverished laborer, is forced to sell his daughter Pari in order to give the other members of his family a chance of survival. This painful decision not only devastates Saboor but rip apart two little children who are world to each other. Ten-year-old Abdullah is not just an elder brother but a mother to his little sister, Pari. He does for Pari what a mother usually does for her child. Nabi, the children's uncle, in a letter written decades after to Mr Markos, describes the bond the children shared. The bond between the siblings is so natural, strong and unshakeable.

Abdullah not only acts as a mother to his little sister tending to her every need but is prepared to go to any length to make her happy. He gives Pari feathers of different birds, which are her most cherished belongings, and she keeps them inside a tin box like a treasure. Abdullah once hears of a boy from another village whose family owns a peacock. He walks to that village, finds the boy, and after negotiation agrees to trade his only pair of shoes for that 'iridescent green peacock feather.' He returns home bare foot with injured and bleeding heels.

Saboor decides to take Pari along with him to Kabul under the pretext of a fabricated story that he is going there to help with the construction work undertaken by their uncle Nabi's employer. Unaware of the truth behind Saboor and Pari's journey to Kabul, Abdullah sense a foreboding. He trails behind them, bearing not just his father's cutting looks; who pelts him with stones, and orders him to go back home, but also swallows two hard slaps from him which makes his face burn and tears leak from his eyes. All for the sake of a sister he loves above himself, and couldn't see her depart. When Abdullah refuses to budge, Saboor allows him to accompany them. Abdullah trudges behind the wagon, unmindful of the excruciating pain his badly bruised feet are causing to him, the cuts and bruises he received when he traded his only pair of shoes for the green peacock feather. From the wagon Pari quickly slips her hand into Abdullah's. She looks at him, her eyes liquid, smiling.

Hosseini has here contrasted the harsh natural conditions Saboor, Abdullah and Pari are braving: the wide desert, blazing hot sun, still air, cracked floor, barren and uninhabited landscape, with the pure, unconditional, and unwavering love of a brother for her sister, and an equally tender love and faith of a sister in her elder brother. The harsh natural surroundings seem to fade away before the sparkling love and care of the innocent sibling. If Pari believes that, **"no bad thing would ever befall her so long as he (Abdullah) stood at her side."** Abdullah believes that Pari is, **"the only person in the world who would never hurt him."** Oblivious to the devastating truth about to unfold when they would reach Kabul, the children engage in conversation that not only shows their innocence and attachment to each other, but also foreshadows the painful twist that would rip these innocent sibling apart.

In a life full of hardships and extreme poverty, where they are denied even the basic necessities



of life, what both the children wish for is not any comforts or luxuries of life but each other's company. They want to be with each other until they are old, very old. The only promise little Pari wants from her brother is to 'be close by' her always and Abdullah promises her by saying, 'for always and always' little knowing that every step of their journey is taking him closer to his unimaginable separation from his beloved sister. He is unaware that his promise of always remaining close by his sister will soon turn into losing her forever. This 'for always' also signifies that even though Abdullah will very soon get physically separated from his sister, but she will remain in his heart and memories always.

Hosseini's characters are the victims of external forces that are too powerful to overcome and beyond their control. Circumstances they can't defeat. They are cornered in such a way that they find it difficult to escape. Saboor's decision to give away Pari in return for money that is so vital for the survival of his family not only shatters him but devastates Abdullah too; shakes the foundations of his existence and cuts the emotional umbilical cord of his life. Abdullah knows he cannot do anything but to accept his father's painful decision. He is helpless, powerless, choiceless and too young to do anything about it. Poverty-stricken Saboor is also left with no other choice but to accept Nabi's proposal. Poverty forces him to take a decision that no parent would take otherwise; sacrificing a child and saving the remaining family members from imminent hunger and death.

To his utter surprise and dismay, Abdullah finds, how quickly and easily the village of Shadbagh has forgotten his dear little sister, as she never existed. Her loss is reflected only in the eyes of Shuja, the dog she loved and was loved back. Hosseini says 'Zendagi Migzara' means life goes on. People carry on even after suffering the most devastating physical, emotional and financial losses. But for Abdullah,

Pari's loss is too big to forget and move on. He finds himself engulfed in her memories. Like Baba Ayub of his father's story, who is forced to part with his beloved son Qais in order to save his family from being killed by the div, and the div taking pity on Baba Ayub, gives him a magic potion to drink that erases from his mind the memories of his beloved son. Abdullah wish for the same magic potion to erase the memories of his beloved sister, but all in vain. Burdened with the memories of his sister and unable to cope with the emotional trauma, Abdullah leaves Shadbagh. Abdullah removes himself physically from the people and the place that reminds him of his sister, but he fails in his objective. Abdullah leaves Afghanistan and settles in San Francisco but Pari's memories follow him there. Through this story, Hosseini brings home the point, that physical separation and distance, long lapse of time and change of place, do not rid a man of memories, both good and bad.

Hosseini leaves this touching sibling story and deals with other stories and events. It is only at the end of the story and after decades have rolled by that we meet Abdullah, the owner of Abe's Kabob at San Francisco; a man in his sixties, suffering from dementia. Hosseini skips almost five decades of Abdullah's life and by the time we meet him at the end of the story, a chapter narrated by his daughter Pari, we get a glimpse of what happened in that period. The first thing that strikes a reader is his bond with his lost sister. He names his only child after her. In the last chapter of Abdullah's life after leaving Afghanistan the thing that strikes us most is the fact that Abdullah never got emotionally separated from Pari. She has been with him all along, so much so that Pari Jr., Abdullah's daughter feels her presence in her life only because of the stories she had heard about her from her father. She remains an integral part of him even in absentia, so much so that he not only names his only child after her but pass on her memories to his daughter as well.

**Reunion of Abdullah and Pari :**

Life doesn't give such magic potions to humans to forget things, the memory of which hurts. But age does work as a magic potion for Pari. She is too young to comprehend the gravity of what just happened in her life. With the passage of time she completely forgets the brother she loved and for whom she was the most precious thing. She forgets her past and like a sapling, gets replanted into the house of Wahdatis. Through Dr. Markos Varvaris, Pari comes to know about the reality of her life and the event that separated her from her family and her beloved brother. She tracks down Abdullah, and when she goes to meet him in San Francisco she confesses to his daughter that she always felt that something has been missing, something good. She didn't know what. She sensed an absence, a vague pain without a source. When she finally meets Abdullah, he fails to recognize her due to dementia. At the time of their painful separation Abdullah had wished for a magic potion that would help erase the memories of his beloved sister from his mind, but unfortunately he didn't get any, and lived almost six decades remembering her, keeping her and her memories alive, and a hope that someday he will get reunited with her.

When fortune finally smiles on him, due to dementia, he fails to recognize her. But in a role reversal we see Pari taking care of the old and mentally unsound Abdullah, as he had taken care of her in their childhood. Pari Jr. hands over a package to Pari superscribed, "For my sister Pari." With an envelope taped to it. When Pari opens the package she finds an old tin tea box, on its lid a faded picture of a bearded Indian man wearing a long red tunic inside it. When she opens the latch and lifts the lid, she finds the interior stuffed with feathers of all colors and all shapes. Pari lifts a feather, brushes it against her wrist, eyeing it as though hoping it might spring to life and take flight. She does not know what

this feather means, the story of it, but she knows that he was thinking of her for all these years. He always remembered her. 'The sad little fairy' who was 'blown away by the wind' gets reunited with her long lost brother.

Conclusion :

'*And the Mountains Echoed*' is not dark and depressing. There is light within each story, a light constantly nudging the reader to believe that no matter how broken the characters, no matters how alone a human being may really be, somehow every life manages to go on, if only to realize that happiness lies in the small things. Hosseini wonderfully dealt with the varied themes such as pain, love and familial love in his third novel and won worldwide fame for his artistic fervor.

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