KHALED HOSSEINI

AUTHOR OF
THE KITE RUNNER
AND
A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

A NOVEL

AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED
# Table of Contents

Discussion Questions 3

Siblings' Separation Haunts In 'Kite Runner' Author's Latest 5

About Khaled Hosseini 9

The Tumultuous History Behind *And the Mountains Echoed*'s Female Poet 10
Discussion Questions

1. *And the Mountains Echoed* introduces us to Saboor and his children Abdullah and Pari, and the shocking, heartbreaking event that divides them. From there, the book branches off to include multiple other characters and storylines before circling back to Abdullah and Pari. How do each of the other characters relate back to the original story? What themes is the author exploring by having these stories counterpoint one another?

2. The novel begins with a tale of extraordinary sacrifice that has ramifications through generations of families. What do you think of Saboor’s decision to let the adoption take place? How are Nila and Nabi implicated in Saboor’s decision? What do you think of their motives? Who do you think is the most pure or best intended of the three adults? Ultimately, do you think Pari would have had a happier life if she had stayed with her birth family?

3. Think of other sacrifices that are made throughout the book. Are there certain choices that are easier than others? Is Saboor’s sacrifice when he allows Pari to be adopted easier or more difficult than Parwana’s sacrifice of her sister? How are they similar and how are they different? Who else makes sacrifices in the book? What do you think the author is saying about the nature of the decisions we make in our lives and the ways in which they affect others?

4. “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, / there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” The author chose this thirteenth-century Rumi poem as the epigraph for the book. Discuss the novel in light of this poem. What do you think he is saying about rightdoing and wrongdoing in the lives of his characters, or in the world?

5. The book raises many deep questions about the wavering line between right and wrong, and whether it is possible to be purely “good”—or purely “bad.” What do you think after reading the novel: Are good intentions enough to create good deeds? Can positive actions come from selfish motivations? Can bad come from positive intent? How do you think this novel would define a good person? How would you define one?

6. Discuss the question of wrongdoing and rightdoing in the context of the different characters and their major dilemmas in the book: Saboor and his daughter Pari; Parwana and her sister, Masooma; the expats, Idris and Timur, and the injured girl, Roshi; Adel, his warlord father, and their interactions with Gholam and his father (and Abdullah’s half brother), Iqbal; Thalia and her mother. Do any of them regret the things they have done? What impact does it have on them?

7. The overlapping relationships of the different characters are complex and reflective of real life. Discuss the connections between the different characters, how they are made, grow, and are sustained. Consider all the ways in which an event in one of the families in
the book can resonate in the lives of so many other characters. Can you name some examples?

8. Saboor’s bedtime story to his children opens the book. To what degree does this story help justify Saboor’s heart-wrenching act in the next chapter? In what ways do other characters in the novel use storytelling to help justify or interpret their own actions? Think about your own experiences. In what ways do you use stories to explain your own past?

9. Two homes form twin focal points for the novel: the family home of Saboor, Abdullah, and Pari—and later Iqbal and Gholam—in Shadbagh; and the grand house initially owned by Suleiman in Kabul. Compare the homes and the roles they play in the novel. Who has claims to each house? What are those claims based on? How do the questions of ownership complicate how the characters relate to one another?

10. The old oak tree in Shadbagh plays an important role for many different characters (Parwana, Masooma, Saboor, Abdullah, and Pari) during its life. What is its significance in the story? What do its branches represent? Why do you think Saboor cuts it down? How does its stump come back as an important landmark later on?

11. In addition to all of the important family relationships in the book, there are also many nongenetic bonds between characters, some of them just as strong. Discuss some of these specific relationships and what needs they fill. What are the differences between these family and nonfamily bonds? What do you think the author is trying to say about the presence of these relationships in our lives?

12. *And the Mountains Echoed* begins in Afghanistan, moves to Europe and Greece, and ends in California, gradually widening its perspective. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish by including so many different settings and nationalities? What elements of the characters’ different experiences would you say are universal? Do you think the characters themselves would see it that way?

13. Discuss the title, *And the Mountains Echoed*, and why you think it was chosen. Can you find examples of echoes or recurrences in the plot? In the structure of the storytelling?

http://khaledhosseini.com/books/and-the-mountains-echoed/discussion-questions/
Siblings' Separation Haunts In 'Kite Runner' Author's Latest

by NPR STAFF
May 19, 2013 5:41 AM ET

There was a time around the year 2003, before e-books and e-readers, when it seemed that everywhere you turned - in an airport, on a bus, anywhere people read - people were reading "The Kite Runner." It was an epic tale set in Afghanistan and it sold more than seven million copies in the U.S. and was translated into over 40 languages. It catapulted the man who wrote it, Khaled Hosseini, onto the global literary stage. Hosseini followed that success with another about his homeland, "A Thousand Splendid Suns." That too became a bestseller. And now, six years later, he has written another heart-wrenching tale. Yes, it is also set in Afghanistan but the narrative extends to California, Paris, even the Greek islands. Khaled Hosseini joins me now from Stanford, California. Welcome to the program, Mr. Hosseini.

KHALED HOSSEINI: Hi, Rachel. How are you?

MARTIN: I'm well. Nice to have you on the show. At its core, your latest book is really a story about family, one family in particular. And the story begins with a couple of characters named Abdullah and Pari. Can you introduce us to them?

HOSSEINI: Yeah. It begins in 1952. Abdullah and Pari - Abdullah is 10; Pari is three - and they're living in a remote and impoverished village with their father and their stepmother and their baby stepbrother. And the family finds itself at a critical point. They lost a baby to the winter the year before, and winter is around the corner again and the family is desperate to survive the winter. And they're about to make a decision to change the lives of these two characters, Abdullah and Pari. And it's this decision, which ends up splitting the brother and sister, which informs really the heart of the book.

MARTIN: I wonder if you could read us a passage from the book near the beginning. This is after this separation has occurred. Abdullah and Pari have been split up, and Abdullah is wishing he could just forget that he ever even knew her so that the pain would be lessened.

HOSSEINI: (Reading) Abdullah would find himself on a spot where Pari had once stood, her absence like a smell pushing up from the earth beneath his feet, and his legs would buckle, and his heart would collapse in on itself. Pari hovered, unbidden, at the edge of Abdullah's vision everywhere he went. She was like the dust that clung to his shirt. She was in the silences that
had become so frequent at the house, silences that welled up between their words, sometimes
cold and hollow, sometimes pregnant with things that went unsaid, like a cloud filled with rain
that never fell. Some nights he dreamed that he was in the desert again, alone, surrounded by
the mountains and in the distance a single tiny glint of light flicking on, off, on, off, like a
message.

MARTIN: There is a lot in this story about the power of memory and dreams, thoughts, how we
try to control them, how we lose control, how those mental impressions shape our reality. What
was it about that idea that captured your own imagination, made it into something you wanted to
explore in this book?

HOSSEINI: Well, in some ways, I see the characters in this book, as with all of us in real li
fe, as
victims of the passage of time. And memory is the way with which we gauge that. So, memory is
a recurring theme in this book and the question is raised a number of times about whether
memory is a blessing - something that safeguards, you know, all the things that are dear to you.
Or is memory a curse? You know, something that makes you relive the most painful parts of
your life - the toil, the struggle, the sorrows.

MARTIN: You've just introduced us to two of the central characters, these siblings. But from
there you take the reader into the lives of a lot of other people in this family connected directly
and tangentially over a lifetime of experience, each story kind of feeding into the next. And as a
reader, you're not really sure what's going to h
appen on the next page, when the next chapter
comes whose perspective will be revealed. Did the story just emerge to you that way or was this
a more deliberate decision?

HOSSEINI: It kind of happened that way as I wrote it. The novel began very, very small and it
began with a single image in my head that I simply could not shed. And it was the image of a
man walking across the desert and he's pulling a little Radio Flyer red wagon. And in it there's a
little girl about three years old, and there's a boy walking behind him. And these three people
are walking across the desert. And I had no idea who they were, or why they were walking
across the desert, what the story was behind them, what their dynamic was. And I sat down to
explore that. And then it just kept snowballing. I began to see backstory, and I began to see how
what happened to these three characters, particularly the little boy and the little girl, would have
such profound impact, not only on their life but on the lives of so many different characters. And
I listened to the voice of those other characters and I went chasing them.

MARTIN: I could imagine it's also hard to know when to stop then. If you're always writing the
next echo, how do you know when it's done? I know that's kind of a cliched question, but
especially because of the way you've structured this, did it just feel finished?

HOSSEINI: No, I would love to go back and write two, three, or four or five more, but at some
point somebody has to stop you. I know, and none of my novels feel finished to me. I mean, if I
had my way I'd go back and add and edit and take out and reshape. But at some point you do have to stop.

MARTIN: I'd like to talk a little bit about Afghanistan, which is the setting for your work. And Afghanistan's own political chaos, and particularly life under the Taliban, has been a central feature of your other two books. It is not the case with this story. I mean, there are references to it but the narrative itself does not revolve around this.

HOSSEINI: No.

MARTIN: How did that come to be?

HOSSEINI: Part of it was as I wrote the characters, it just kind of, the way it came to me and the way they were shaped, their struggles turned out to be far more intimate and personal. I mean, often it had to do with loss - of memory, of faculty, of love - and so the impact of the toil in Afghanistan is still there but I think its effect on the lives of the characters is less resounding. I hope a day will come when we write about Afghanistan, where we can speak about Afghanistan in a context outside of the wars and the struggles of the last 30 years. In some way I think this book is an attempt to do that.

MARTIN: Your first book, "The Kite Runner," is about fathers and sons. And "A Thousand Splendid Suns," your second, is mostly about mothers and daughters. This book seems bigger. I mean, yes, there's the central relationship about Abdullah and Pari, the sibling relationship - and there are other siblings - but it extends to different kinds of relationships. Can you talk a little bit about this progression for you?

HOSSEINI: Well, I think at core, all three of my books have been love stories, and they haven't been traditional love stories in the sense that a romantic love story between a man and a woman. You know, they've been stories of love between characters where you would not expect love to be found. So, it is always these intense relationships that form under very unexpected circumstances. And it's the same with this book. There are a number of instances where you have relationships between characters that are very intense and life-changing and yet they're between people you would not expect it to happen. And for some reason I'm drawn to that. I love writing about that. I'm not very interested in writing about sort of traditional, romantic love, I think. You know, that's something that's in my books, but not one that I seem to be all that interested in.

MARTIN: What has this journey been like for yourself to have had these - "Kite Runner" was such this huge success and "Thousand Splendid Suns" after it. Do you put more pressure on yourself now to meet that standard every time?

HOSSEINI: I don't feel any pressure to be, quote-unquote, "successful" in economic or commercial or number of books sold and so on. The real angst comes from the very real
possibility that one day I will sit, and I will have nothing more to say. Because I enjoy so much the process of writing - losing myself in another person's life, and kind of going off to these imaginary places and looking up from the computer and eight hours have passed and I have no idea where they went, and writing things that, to me, feel intimate and real and genuine. I don't take that for granted.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

MARTIN: Khaled Hosseini. His latest novel is called "And the Mountains Echoed." He joined us from Stanford, California. Mr. Hosseini, it's been a pleasure. Thank you so much.

HOSSEINI: Thank you for having me. Much appreciated.

MARTIN: You can find an excerpt of "And the Mountains Echoed" on our website, npr.org. You're listening to WEEKEND EDITION from NPR News.

About Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. His father was a diplomat in the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and history at a high school in Kabul. In 1976, the Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris. They were ready to return to Kabul in 1980, but by then their homeland had witnessed a bloody communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet Army. The Hosseinis sought and were granted political asylum in the United States, and in September 1980 moved to San Jose, California. Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1988. The following year he entered the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, where he earned a medical degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai medical center in Los Angeles and was a practicing internist between 1996 and 2004.

In March 2001, while practicing medicine, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. Published by Riverhead Books in 2003, that debut went on to become an international bestseller and beloved classic, sold in at least seventy countries and spending more than a hundred weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In May 2007, his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, remaining in that spot for fifteen weeks and nearly an entire year on the bestseller list. Together, the two books have sold more than 10 million copies in the United States and more than 38 million copies worldwide. *The Kite Runner* was adapted into a graphic novel of the same name in 2011. Hosseini’s much-awaited third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, will be published on May 21, 2013.

In 2006, Hosseini was named a Goodwill Envoy to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency. Inspired by a trip he made to Afghanistan with the UNHCR, he later established *The Khaled Hosseini Foundation*, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, which provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. He lives in Northern California.

http://khaledhosseini.com/biography/
The Tumultuous History Behind And the Mountains Echoed's Female Poet

Nila Wahdati, the morally complicated writer in Khaled Hosseini’s latest novel, represents a rich, controversial tradition of women’s poetry in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.

Ashley Fetters, May 29 2013, 2:00 PM ET

Women visit a record store in Kabul in the 1950s or early 1960s. (Wikimedia / Mohammad Qayoumi)

There’s a character in Khaled Hosseini’s expansive new novel And the Mountains Echoed who has stayed with me ever since I finished it: Nila Wahdati, the gifted, stylish, condemned French-Afghan housewife who writes impassioned poetry about love, sex, desire, and loss in 1950s Kabul. Nila, who marries a wealthy heir and later adopts a daughter by way of the child-selling scheme that sets the book’s many interconnected plots in motion, finds herself and her poetry the objects of scorn among some crowds in her native Afghanistan—but the objects of high praise and admiration among others. As a result, she maintains a tragically conflicted relationship with her writing throughout her life.
In creating Nila Wahdati's story and its backdrop, Hosseini seems to have drawn inspiration from a real, far-reaching historical saga that deserves a novel or two of its own: the centuries-long, ongoing struggle of Afghanistan's female poets, who have enjoyed eras of flourishing freedom of expression and endured eras of forced secrecy. Today, female poets hold a special place in the canon of Afghan literature.

Poetry has always been a cherished form of expression in Afghanistan and its surrounding area for both the literate and the non-literate; as Hosseini writes in And the Mountains Echoed, even the graffiti artists in Kabul spray-paint verses of Rumi on the walls. The centuries-old Persian written tradition boasts some of the great poets of Iran, India, and Central Asia, and among these poets are a few women—like the 10th-century poet Rabe’eh Qozdari, who wrote bitter, satirical poems about suffering and unhappiness in love. And though the work of male poets has been better preserved over the years, the works by surviving female poets have, as Nancy Hatch Dupree put it in a 2002 article in Third World Quarterly, "pleaded for the right of women to be seen as individuals freed from societies' inequities."

Poetry written in Pashto, the language of the Pashtun ethnic group, has a particularly rich legacy of women's poetry: The landai, a short, vitriolic verse form that takes its name from a Pashto word meaning "short, poisonous snake," became the chosen form centuries ago for women who railed against the widespread notion that the female sex was inferior or submissive. According to a 2012 New York Times story by Eliza Griswold, The word also refers to two-line folk poems that can be just as lethal. Funny, sexy, raging, tragic, landai are safe because they are collective. No single person writes a landai; a woman repeats one, shares one. It is hers and not hers. Although men do recite them, almost all are cast in the voices of women. "Landai belong to women," Safia Siddiqi, a renowned Pashtun poet and former Afghan parliamentarian, said. "In Afghanistan, poetry is the women's movement from the inside." Traditionally, landai have dealt with love and grief. They often railed against the bondage of forced marriage with wry, anatomical humor. An aging, ineffectual husband is frequently described as a "little horror." But they have also taken on war, exile and Afghan independence with ferocity. ...

Like most folk literature, landai can be sorrowful or bawdy. Imagine the Wife of Bath riding through the Himalayan foothills and uttering landai so ribald that they curled the toes of her fellow travelers. She might tease her rival: "Say hello to my sweetheart/If you are a farter [tizan, one who farts a lot], then I can fart louder than you." She might make a cutting political joke: "Your black eyelashes are Israel/and my heart is Palestine under your attack." She might utter an elegiac couplet: "My beloved gave his head for our country/I will sew his shroud with my hair."

Hosseini’s novel, though, takes place in the 20th century, and Nila’s story unfolds (at first) in the cosmopolitan Kabul of the early 1950s. By then, Kabul had become profoundly Westernized, in sharp contrast with the rest of the nation: Beginning in the 1920s, the sons and daughters of the
wealthy were often educated at secular international secular schools (often called lycées) opened by French, German, English, and American teachers, so students in these schools often studied literature in their teachers’ native languages and in Dari (Persian) and Pashto. According to a 2002 article by Anthony Hyman in the Journal of Middle East Studies, the literature coming out of Afghanistan at the time was heavily influenced by both Western and European writers (like John Steinbeck and Maxim Gorki) and ancient and contemporary Middle Eastern texts.

And in the mid-20th century, according to Dupree, "educated men and women adopted Western dress... Many group-identifying symbols began to fade as a result, particularly in matters of dress."

So Nila, with her fluency in French, her love of literature, her high heels, sleeveless pastel minidresses, and white-framed sunglasses, is a recognizable product of that particular place and time in Afghanistan. But Nila’s outward expressions of female desire (both poetic and otherwise) remain somewhat controversial in the story—even in an era that was, historically, a progressive one in Kabul. Nila’s husband’s family doesn’t approve of their marriage, and when the subject comes up in a discussion between the immigrant household helpers of their neighborhood, the following exchange ensues:

He said it was well known in Kabul that she had no nang and namoos, no honor, and that though she was only twenty, she had already been "ridden all over town" like Mr. Wahdati’s car. Worst of all, he said, not only had she made no attempt to deny these allegations, she wrote poems about them. A murmur of disapproval spread through the room when he said this. One of the men remarked that in his village they would have slit her throat by now.

Later in life, Nila bitterly remembers her Afghan father’s reaction to her poetry: "No one in Kabul considered me a pioneer of anything but bad taste, debauchery, and immoral character. Not least of all, my father. He said my writings were the ramblings of a whore. ... He said I’d damaged his family name beyond repair."

And yet, when she hosts parties for her wealthy friends, Nila’s guests beg her to recite some of her poems. In the presence of the Kabul elite, she recites arresting poetry about "lovers whispering across pillows, touching each other," about "pleasure."

"I had never heard language such as this spoken by a woman," the narrator—an immigrant from a small village a day’s walk from the capital city—marvels.

So maybe the varied reactions to Nila’s gift for self-expression are meant to reflect the divergent social norms and attitudes toward women that were developing in the various areas of Afghanistan at the time. After all, Dupree writes, it wasn't even until young female broadcasters appeared on the nationwide radio station Radio Afghanistan in the 1950s and 1960s that "the
stigma attached to female voices being heard outside family circles” in parts of Afghanistan began to lessen.

Today, the tradition of women's poetry lives on—and so does its uneven reputation. As Griswold wrote last year, post-Taliban Afghanistan's largest women's literary society, called Mirman Baheer, has "no need for subterfuge” inside Kabul, where its hundred members include educators, scholars, government officials, and professional writers. "They travel on city buses to their Saturday meetings, their faces uncovered, wearing high-heeled boots and shearling coats," Griswold wrote. "But in the outlying provinces—Khost, Paktia, Maidan Wardak, Kunduz, Kandahar, Herat and Farah—where the society's members number 300, Mirman Baheer functions largely in secret."

Female poets in rural Afghanistan (where, as Griswold writes, only five women in 100 graduate from high school, and a majority of whom are forced into marriages by the age of 16) often phone in to meetings and recite their poetry for women on the other end of the line to transcribe. Some are illiterate, others are simply afraid of their written poetry being found; as both Griswold's story and the Al-Jazeera report below explain, girls and women who have been discovered writing sensual poems or love poems have been punished, beaten, and even killed by their husbands and families.

In Hosseini’s novel, Nila takes advantage of an opportunity unavailable to many Afghan women: She flees the country in 1955, leaving her husband and part of her family behind, and enjoys a moderately successful career living abroad in Paris. But in creating the complex, conflicted Nila Wahdati, Hosseini likely drew from the bravery and the struggles of centuries’ worth of female poets in Afghanistan, whose fight to be heard continues.