

As William Styron wisely and accurately denotes, “life is a search for justice.” This quest for fairness is also a ubiquitous theme found throughout literature. In Khaled Hosseini’s novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, he delivers a story that is replete with characters that are in search of said justice, but the paragon of this search is seen most clearly through the character Mariam, a poor *harami* girl, a “weed” from the outskirts of Herat, Afghanistan. It is through Mariam that we see an individual who struggles to grasp the meaning of justice amidst myriad trials, yet she successfully attains this heroic boon by discovering that a “*legitimate*” life is not determined by the injustices that are thrust upon an individual, rather a genuine life is attained when despite all odds, one chooses to love, allows others to love in return, and embraces selflessly the service required of being a “friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. A person of [the truest] consequence” (329).

Mariam’s own birth throws her into a hunt for justice. As the illegitimate child of a mother servant and a father of wealth and high esteem, Mariam is born into a life that immediately comes with the title *harami*, a bastard. Through no fault of her own, in fact, the fault lies solely upon the parents, Nana and Jalil, Mariam is not only burdened with an ugly title, but she is also physically stripped from her hometown of Herat, and placed as a pariah in the outskirts of Gul Duman. Even with her cynical mother there as a constant reminder of the injustice they must both “endure,” Mariam, as a result of the beautiful innocence and naivety that comes with childhood, holds aspirations of one day being reunited with her father. Her first search for justice comes to fruition when she boldly decides to cross society’s threshold and seeks out her father and siblings in Herat. The end result is devastating, with Jalil denying and betraying Mariam. The suicide of Nana will not allow for Mariam to return to the safer confines of home. Instead, she is pushed further into a search for a legitimate life by the very person who has denied her justice since birth, for Jalil marries Mariam off to the cruel and abusive Rasheed. It’s interesting to note that though Jalil forced so much injustice upon Mariam, ironically, it is Jalil that allows Mariam to discover her own sense of legitimacy dying with great pride and resolve, and it is Jalil who is forced to seek out his own sense of justice dying with great contrition and regret.

Rasheed and the Taliban are omnipresent reminders of the injustice that Mariam must endure, and were it not for the introduction of Laila and Aziza, Mariam’s search for a genuine life would have surely come to a cynical and bitter end. Aziza is the first to break down emotional barriers and help Mariam rediscover her path to justice. Notice the motif that, once again, it is the innocence of youth that provides the hope necessary to continue her quest. Equally significant is the fact that Laila allows Mariam to discover what it is to be a true companion, a selfless mother willing to risk everything in order to protect individuals she has courageously permitted to be what essentially become her adopted daughter and granddaughter. Mariam embraces the onus of caregiver and protector, a choice that is astoundingly brazen considering the extreme temptation she is surrounded with to give in to Nana’s bitter words of the past and Rasheed’s brutal reminders of hopelessness.

In short, Mariam is a character that beautifully embodies the search for justice, and she is a character that maintains the sagacity to seek out said justice through service, friendship and the ultimate sacrifice, a reminder that Khaled Hosseini no doubt wished to impart upon his readers as to how to arrive at justice and crescendo into a meaningful, *legitimate* life.