

Glossing and Un-translated words in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

1. *Glossing*

It is the explanatory comment attached to a text. It can be a word, a sentence or a clause, qualifying the non-English word. It is one of the most common devices used by authors in cross-cultural texts. The glossed words are the manifestation of cultural distance. Hosseini has deliberately used the word harami in the very first sentence of the novel. Obviously, most English speaking western readers are not likely to be aware of the meaning of this word. However, when the writer repeatedly uses it, the readers gather the meaning in context and feel the sting attached to it:

You are a clumsy little harami. This is my reward for everything I've endured. An heirloom-breaking, clumsy little harami. (p. 4)

The writer first wants the reader to understand it unaided and does the glossing in its fourth occurrence. Apart from this being a language strategy, it may also be noted that the intensity attached to this word in an Eastern society like Afghanistan may not be the same as in most European and American societies. Therefore, the use of harami significantly differs from its Standard English counterparts/alternatives like 'bastard' and euphemistic expressions like 'love child' as it entails a vast cultural/religious background embedded in social norms and beliefs. Further, a child born out of wedlock, in the US for instance, may be legitimized if the couple decides to register their relationship even after the birth of the baby; but in societies like the one under discussion, it is not accepted generally.

The novelist leaves the word Kolba (p. 3) un glossed in the beginning. When he glosses it, he is not content with a single word; rather, he places it in context, thereby constructing meaning around the word. Then finally the way of its construction is elaborated which installs a gap between Kolba and hut:

In the clearing, Jalil and two of his sons, Farhad and Muhsin, built the small kolba where Mariam would live the first fifteen years of her life. They raised it with sun-dried bricks and plastered it with mud and handfuls of straw. It had two sleeping cots, a wooden table, two straight-backed chairs, a window, and shelves nailed to the walls where Nana placed clay pots and her beloved Chinese tea set. (p. 10)

This description highlights the implicit gap between the word 'Kolba' and hut.

2. *Un-translated words*

This device (leaving words un-glossed/untranslated) allows the selection of certain untranslated lexical items to keep the cultural distinctiveness intact.

Hosseini makes extensive use of un-translated words. A word peculiar to the writer's culture is *Jinn* (p. 3) with an altogether different concept in South Asia when compared with its meanings in English speaking societies. *Jinn*, in South Asian countries, is considered to be an invisible power possessing an individual thereby making him follow his dictates, as it happens to Mariam's mother, Nana, who commits suicide. Nana expresses her apprehensions even before committing this extreme act: "I will die if you go. The jinn will come and I will have one of my fits. You will see, I will swallow my tongue and die" (p. 26). This state of mind springs from a whole worldview and faith system. Therefore, for most western readers (and for many educated people even in Afghanistan and Pakistan), it would only be superstitious to believe in such supernatural creatures. Perhaps for this reason, Hosseini has used this word instead of Ghost or witch or fairy.

Similarly, since the action of the novel is located in a Muslim society, he uses religious terms such as *azan* (p. 56), *muezzin* (p. 157), *namaz* (p. 15) and *sajda* (p. 75). These terms do not have their equivalents in English language, though *azan* can be translated as 'a call for prayer' yet doing so will not convey its full associated religious significance.