

**PORTRAYAL OF WAR AND VIOLENCE AND A CALL FOR PEACE IN
*THE KITE RUNNER***

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Abstract

Khaled Hosseini, famous Afghan born American fictional writer is well known for his unparalleled contributions in the arena of literature. All his novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed* show his literary eminence and social concern. All his novels found plot in Afghanistan, a country that is shattered by war, both internal and external. Hosseini's first novel, *The Kite Runner*, tries to illuminate the inequalities and violations of individual freedom in Afghanistan society. The novel tries to make substantial changes in Afghan society by showing both the good and bad aspects of their tradition, custom and social system. This document also testifies the atrocities that were prevalent in Afghanistan during Taliban rule. Thus, in the novel Hosseini turns critical towards the appalling situation of his motherland yet develops an optimistic vision and hope for a better tomorrow in his masterpiece.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, Afghanistan society, war, inequality, literature and social change.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan born American writer, is one of the well known fictional writers of the twenty first century. All his novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed* show his literary genius and responsibility towards his motherland. His novels advocate the themes of equality, importance of family ties, rights of women, agitations against children, and war. All his novels have been well received both by the readers and critics. His first novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003), shows light towards his motherland, Afghanistan, its sidetracked and war affected social scenario, and a recall for peace and equality. The novel has been widely read and acclaimed all across the world and several critics reviewed it

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as one of the finest literary creations of this century with sumptuous fictional and realistic ingredients.

Afghanistan is considered as the connecting link between the South Asia and Central Asia. It possesses unique culture, history, politics, religious tradition, and tribal groups. The geographical position of Afghanistan reveals its beauty and supremacy in the region. Martin Ewans observes as follows:

Afghanistan is a land of stark and rugged beauty, of snow-covered mountains, barren deserts and rolling steppe. Situated at the eastern of the Iranian plateau, it covers 250, 000 square miles, an area about the size of Texas, rather larger than France, rather smaller than Turkey. Some two-thirds of it lies above 5, 000 feet, and several of its mountains are among the highest in the world. (Ewans 1)

The history of Afghanistan can be traced back to 5000 B. C., but a detailed account of its history is available from 328 B.C., when Alexander the Great entered into the country. During early times Afghanistan was under the Persian rule. In 642 A. D. the Arabs invaded Afghanistan and established Islam religion in the country. In 1219, Genghis Khan and his followers made Mongol invasion in Afghanistan and established the supremacy of Hazaras in Afghanistan. This dominance of Hazaras declined after the death of Genghis and in 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani, a Pashtun came into reign and established the country, Afghanistan. All the rulers during this period tried to bring Afghanistan as an independent state and kept away themselves from interacting with other countries.

Afghanistan came into the attention of the world during the rule of King Amanullah. He tried to modernize Afghanistan by implementing a number of reform acts that were against the orthodox concept of his predecessors. His revolutions in the panorama of Afghanistan consist of the abolishing the traditional concepts about the veil for women, opening large number of educational institutions, and alienating extremist tribal and religious leaders from the country. Amanullah faced strong resistance and opposition from different sectors of the country, especially from the staunch orthodox leaders. Gradually all these antagonisms took violent form and Amanullah handed over the power to his cousin King Nadir Shah in 1929. After four years of power Nadir Shah was assassinated, and his son, Mohammad Zahir Shah reigned the country from 1933-1973. In 1953, Sardar Mohammad Daoud came into the position of prime minister and he ruled for ten years. But he was suspected for supporting the implementation of a new Pashtun state and dismissed from power in 1963 (Sherman 10-11)

In 1973, Daoud retained power through military operation. But in 1978 PDPA (The Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan) seized the power and revolted against the orthodox believes that existed in Afghanistan. In 1979, The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. They left Afghanistan in 1989 and from there Taliban ruled Afghanistan till 2001. From there United States America is a major role in rebuilding Afghanistan. Currently, Afghanistan is slowly becoming a democratic country. (Sherman 11)

The Kite Runner is well known for the depiction of Afghan society as in a mirror. Political, cultural, historical, and social elements of the nation are vibrantly explained in the novel. The life of Afghan people and their sufferings are one of the major concerns for Hosseini in the novel. In relation with the history of Afghanistan the whole structure of the novel can be

divided into three parts. Firstly, Afghanistan before the war, secondly, war affected Afghanistan, thirdly, the post-war era or the contemporary Afghanistan.

The novel beautifully portrays the sufferings and pains of Afghan people. The event of kite running itself contains pain and suffering. Irrespective of the fact that it is an event for enjoyment, children fight with kites to seize victory. In order to attain success in kite tournaments they have to cut down other's kites. During these fights, the twain that is used by the children hurt their hands and at the end one snatches the conquest. As a matter of fact, all the inmates of the region including their parents, relatives, and friends come to see the tournament and support their children. No one is afraid of the fact that all the participants in the tournament get hurt, rather they enjoy the fight. Thus, the kite tournaments that have been mentioned in the novel are the exquisite evidences of the inevitable relation between sufferings and joy in the life of Afghans.

Tribal discrimination is another concern for Hosseini in *The Kite Runner*. He pictures the tribal differences and discriminations through the lives of Ali and Hassan with Baba and Amir. When Baba and Amir are bestowed all happiness of life, including well constructed home, healthy financial security, ample leisure time, and all other securities of life. On the other hand, Ali and Hassan are working in Baba's home to meet their daily food. They live in the 'outhouse' of Baba's home with menial facilities. Amir and Hassan are good friends and they spent their leisure time together. But for the rest of the day Amir is engaged in his studies and other works whereas Hassan is engaged in household works including purchasing, cooking, serving, cleaning and so on:

During the school year, we had a daily routine. By the time I dragged myself out of bed and lumbered to the bathroom, Hassan had already washed up, prayed the morning *namaz* with Ali, and prepared my breakfast: hot black tea with three sugar cubes and a slice of toasted *naan* topped with my favorite sour cherry marmalade, all neatly placed on the dining table. (Hosseini 27)

In order to show the suffering and violence in the novel, Hosseini has skillfully employed the characters. All the characters that are depicted in the novel show the different aspects of Afghan society. The protagonist of the novel, Amir, is the perfect example for this. He is the narrator of the novel and the whole setting of the novel is based on him. In the beginning of the novel, he is a boy, who is fascinated in reading and writing with little interest for sports and athleticism. He spends his leisure time with Hassan, a Hazara boy. But at one point of time, he witnesses that Hassan is brutally raped by Assef. Unfortunately Amir is unable to communicate this to anyone and he is tortured by his inner consciousness. And he suffers from this prick of consciousness for most of the part of his life. At the end of the novel, Amir attains relief when he helps Sohrab, Hassan's son to get rid of his mental and physical tortures in an orphanage at Kabul. But for this cause, Amir has undergone for a number of tortures and sufferings. Thus the character of Amir displays the feelings of guilt and redemption, and at the end of the novel Amir attains redemption through his own efforts to save Sohrab.

Another major character in the novel is Hassan. He is a Hazara boy, who wholeheartedly loves his master and his family and even ready to die for him. The character of Hassan has both individual and type implications. The sufferings that are faced by Hassan in this novel deplore the sufferings of Hazaras in Afghanistan. The novel displays the sufferings of Hazaras in Afghan

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society. They are always thrown to the lower levels of occupation and with menial income. Often their masters behave harshly towards them and the sociopaths like Assef finds immense pleasure in harassing them. He says as follows:

Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be.
We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not his flat- Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our *watan*. They dirty our blood. (40)

Even in the midst of these sufferings Hassan is completely loyal to his master and gives away his life for the cause of his master.

Baba is another character who shows the theme of suffering in the novel. In the early chapters of the novel, he appears as a successful businessman with a stout physis. He symbolizes courage and revolts against the orthodox religious concepts of Islamism and considers theft as the biggest crime:

Now, no matter what the mullah teaches, there is only one sin, only one.
And that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft. (17)

But as the novel progresses, Baba is forced to move away from all the comforts in Afghanistan to the unsecured immigrant life in United States of America. There he strives hard to meet his daily food. In America he meets with terminal cancer and undergoes for severe suffering. Amidst of all these sufferings he finds a suitable spouse for Amir and spends his whole earning for their marriage and dies peacefully:

Baba spent \$35,000, nearly the balance of his life savings, on the *awroussi*, the wedding ceremony. He rented a large afghan banquet hall in the Fremont—the man who owned it knew him from Kabul and gave him a substantial discount. (169)

Later parts of the novel show the black side of Baba's life. Here, Amir comes to know that Hassan was Baba's illicit son. Thus the character of Baba shows both mental and physical suffering and he gets redemption, when Amir takes Sohrab as his own son.

All other characters of the novel also depict different sufferings that are faced by the afghan society. Ali, Hassan's father is the major one in that list. He has a limping leg and children find innumerable pleasure in imitating and teasing him.

I watched him swing his scraggy leg in a sweeping arc, watched his body tilt impossibly to the right every time he planted his foot. It seemed a minor miracle he didn't tip over with each step. When I tried it, I almost fell into the gutter. Ali turned around, caught me aping him he didn't say anything. Not then, not ever. He just kept walking. (Hosseini 8)

But, amidst of all these insulations he is calm and quiet, and engages in his works. Apart from this, Ali suffers a great shame for the reason that Hassan is not his kid, but Hassan calls him as his father.

All the female characters that are portrayed in the novel show the silent suffering of women in Afghan society both in Afghanistan and in abroad. Sanaubar, Hassan's mother is the first among them. In her young age she indulges herself in physical pleasures and has a number of relationships with many men. As a result of her undisciplined life she gets pregnant from Baba and gives birth to Hassan. Even after that she runs away from them with a musical band. But she is physically exploited by different men and at the end she thrown away to the street. At the last parts of the novel, she comes back to Hassan and helps him to bring up Sohrab.

Soraya is another women character who suffers a lot for a single mistake. Once she came into relation with a man and they ended in an unsuccessful attempt of elopement. Her past foreshadows her present and haunts her as she is considered as a woman of maligned character. Soraya's mother is another woman character who suffers a lot for her husband forbids her performing her talents. She is highly talented musician, but her husband, General Taheri stops her from her passion and she spends her whole life in home by performing her household works. War is the major theme that pervades the whole narration of the novel. There are references to the wars that took place in Afghanistan from 1975 onwards. Hosseini tries to convey the aftereffects of war and shows how war destroyed Afghanistan. When the novel begins Afghanistan was a country where people lives peacefully and looking forward for prosperity and development. But war changed the whole social and political scenario of Afghanistan. Many of its citizen run away from the country and become refugees in other countries. And those who stayed in Afghanistan met with various atrocities and many lost their lives. The Taliban rule was the worst among this. Taliban has killed many Afghans brutally and they tried to execute pseudo Muslim rules. The marginalized and weaker sections of the society including the Hazaras faced fatal challenge during Taliban rule.

Women and children experienced severe sufferings during Taliban rule. Women lost all their securities and freedom during the Taliban rule. They met with end number of inhuman actions and not even considered as human beings. They were undergone for big punishments even for the silly mistakes. Children are another sector who faced much more atrocities from the Taliban. The character of Sohrab in the novel shows the wreak mayhems against children during Taliban rule. In the orphanage Assef insults him in every possible way and when Amir takes him to America he has almost lost every inch of self respect. Thus the novel shows the violations against the individual freedom during war, especially during Taliban rule.

What makes Hosseini different is the optimistic note at the end of the novel. Here Amir helps Sohrab to fly kite that symbolizes the need of equality and peace. Thus, *The Kite Runner* portrays violations of human rights and the impact of war in Afghan society by means of characters, symbols, and themes. But Hosseini doesn't stop there; instead, he urges the whole humanity to hold their hand together for the rehabilitation of the Afghanistan into its pre-war era.

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