

Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner – an Exemplary Work of South Asian Literature

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Abstract

South Asian literature, the umbrella term refers to the literary works of writers from the Indian subcontinent and its neighboring countries. Countries include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, Maldives, Burma, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Iran are included in South Asian Literature. South Asian literature is written primarily in English and also in many national and regional languages and is published universally. Some of the works are translated in other European languages, such as, Portuguese, French and Spanish. The Bookers Prize winning great novelists such as, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy serve as a great source of influence for the recent writers of South Asian Literature.

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan born American Physician turned writer, is a notable novelist of South Asian Literature. His prominent novels are *The Kite Runner*, *And the Mountains Echoed*, *Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Sea Prayer*. My paper here aims to talk about Khaled Hosseini's debut novel 'The Kite Runner', which was published in the year 2003. The love of homeland is one of the major themes of *The Kite Runner*. The protagonist of Hosseini's *Kite Runner*, Amir, is an Afghan immigrant who makes the United States his home. Amir thinks that America represents freedom and choice. Although Baba, father of Amir, faces the humiliation of doing menial jobs in the United States, Amir feels that he is not only free from the stifling atmosphere of his homeland. Baba and Amir go out selling second hand things in a fair on every Saturdays. The other immigrants of Afghanistan will also gather there for selling and buying things. The Afghan immigrants talk about their happiest moments in their homeland

UNDERSTANDING LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY THEORIES- INDIAN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

and the celebration of Kite festival. Though he settles in the United States, his conscious feel of his nation and love for his homeland urges him to get married to a girl Soraya, an immigrant of Afghanistan. Her father is the former general of Afghan army. Amir is forced to leave for Afghanistan from America after the death of his father and his marriage to Soraya to look out for his friend Hassan. He immediately comes to meet Rahim Khan, who is the uncle of Amir and his consciousness about his country and its political situation makes it clear that he is always in touch with his homeland. He is shocked to see his deserted home and his home land being invaded by the Talibans. Though it is his homeland he feels not at home but declares himself a tourist. He thinks about his childhood days flying kite with Hassan. But now he can see only children carrying guns and pistols. He comes to know of his friend Hassan and his son Sohrab through Rahim Khan. Hassan died shortly leaving his son Sohrab. Amir is looking in search of that boy. It is partly out of love for his homeland that he flies to Peshawar to meet Sohrab, son of his half-brother Hassan, who later proves a solace for him and his wife.

Keywords: Experience, Childhood, Solace, Home

Khaled Hosseini was born in Afghanistan in the year 1965, and grew up in the pre-Soviet war era in Afghanistan. He grew up in Kabul. Both of his parents were university educated. His mother was a Farsi and history teacher at a large high school for girls and his father was a diplomat at the Foreign Ministry.

Before the entry of Soviet Union Afghanistan was a country at peace with itself, with its neighbors. Kabul was a growing, thriving, cosmopolitan city which assures the freedom for women and education to women. It is very hard for one to believe the real picture of Afghanistan as it promises a silent and peaceful life for its people before the entry of soviet regime. Hosseini was unfortunate to enjoy the peaceful years as his family was forced to leave their own land. But still then the few years where he had lived and breathe the freshness of Afghan air made him come up with the greatest works like *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *Sea Prayer*, *And The Mountains Echoed* which aims to throw light on the real face of Afghanistan.

Hosseneni wrote his debut novel *The Kite Runner* to show the world some of the common issues carried out in the culture of Afghanistan like that of identity, assimilation and power. He spends a great deal of time in characterizing and developing Amir, the protagonist who has

UNDERSTANDING LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY THEORIES- INDIAN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

realized his self-identity only by the end of the book. Khaled Hosseini has brought out his own experiences in the novel through the narrator, Amir that he had in his early childhood in Afghanistan like flying kites and other instances. Khaled Hosseini and his family sought asylum as refugee in the United States. They found hard to get acquainted with the new culture. This again is clearly pictured in the novel for anyone who left their country to live in America. These instances are proved by the other refugees of Afghanistan adjusting to a life in an alien land which is described in the main characters Baba and Amir. The personal experiences of the author may have inspired and influenced him to come up with the book. He also poignantly shows the difficulties of assimilation into a new culture and country when Baba and Amir move to California leaving their peaceful life, his kite flying, his friends, his pride, power and others.

Amir, the protagonist of this novel is a young Afghan-American writer in San Francisco. He is forced to take a dangerous journey back to his country of origin, during the Taliban regime across a devastated Afghanistan looking for Sohrab, who is the son of his friend Hassan. He recollects his happiest days with Hassan in Afghanistan. He was proud to remember his winning a Kabul's Kite Runner Tournament.

But Hassan, a Hazzara boy does not come back with the kite as he gets insulted and raped by a gang of teenagers. Amir witnesses the scene but dares not to challenge them instead he is found scared and dumfounded. He comes there not to rescue his friend. Instead, he hides his shame and guilt behind anger and denial. Amir and Hassan's bond comes to an end when, a few days later, after the Russian invasion, Amir and his father Baba abandon Kabul and sought asylum in America. This novel transcends Afghan values like "Guilt, friendship, forgiveness, loss, and desire for atonement, and desire to be better than who you think you are. Those are not Afghan themes. Those are not Iranian or Chinese. Those are very human experiences," says the author.

Apart from the characterization there are few things that make the novel exemplary. The intersection of political events and private lives in one another theme that is discussed that touched the hearts of the Afghan refugees who lives across the globe. The major events of the novel revolve around the central character Amir who has followed and witnessed the transitions of Afghanistan. Amir has recollected his childhood experiences where we can understand and see the calm state of Kabul during the monarchy, the entry of the republic, and then watch the invasion of Soviet republic and infighting between the Pashtuns and the Hazzaras rival Afghan groups ruin the country. These events have played an important role in changing the lives of the

characters involved. The establishment of the republic gives Assef, a childhood opponent to Amir and Hassan take it an opportunity to harass Amir, simply because Assef's father knows the new president. The entry of Taliban and their invasion devastated Kabul and its traditional culture and heritage. This destruction forces Baba and Amir to flee to California. When the Taliban take over after that, they murder Hassan and even give Aseef a position that makes him indulge in activities like sadism and sexual urges without repercussions. Both of these events factor into Amir's mission to save Sohrab and his redemption by confronting Aseef, subtly implying that Afghanistan will similarly have its own redemption one day.

The novel has one great feature, the persistence of the past that all the characters in the novel feel the influence of the past. Amir and Sohrab have been the characters who feel much of the past than any other in the novel. . In Sohrab's case, his past has been so traumatizing that it affects all his behavior. As a Hazzara boy, he is traumatized to the prolonged physical and sexual abuse. He endures and feels anytime Amir touches him. He also fears the abandonment he experienced when his parents died so much that he attempts suicide when Amir says he may have to go back to an orphanage. For Amir, the past is always with him, from the book's first sentence, when he says he became what he is today at the age of twelve, to its final sentence. That's because Amir defines himself by his past. His feelings of guilt for his past actions continue to motivate him. Amir even feels responsible for the Taliban murdering Hassan because he thinks he set in motion the events that led to Hassan's death when he pushed Hassan and Ali out of Baba's house. As he says on the book's first page, the past can never be buried.

The Kite Runner, written by Khaled Hosseini, is better described as a "political allegory of a global ethics" says Jefferess. The novel itself, as well as the protagonist, Amir, stand as the symbol of the need for a unified bond between countries, specifically, existing in the United States of America and Afghanistan. This modern classical book aims to educate westerners on the history and culture of Afghanistan. Hosseini himself states that the novel is really about "finally putting a human face to the Afghans" (Hosseini). Hosseini introduces the aspect of universality within the text illustrating the ideas of guilt and redemption that are felt by all people of all nations. This gives the reader familiarity. In this case, that topic is Afghanistan and its culture which is misinterpreted and misunderstands by the people across the globe. To them, the country is mostly associated with terrorism. Hosseini wanted to break these preconceived notions and started with this novel justifying the ignorance of the Afghan people.

The story attempts to bring together two cultures (Pashtuns and Hazzaras), which parallels the necessary coming together of the cultures of two nations like America and Afghanistan. KhaledHosseini's modern classic's primary purpose is to obliterate western assumptions of Afghanistan and introduce the reader to a culture that is not always associated with negativity. Through the characters like Amir and Sohrab, KhaledHosseini talks about the future hope of Afghanistan and their happy living again in their own land by flying kites again.

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