

Hybridity: A Transcultural Analysis of *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

The paper mainly focuses on postcolonial and cultural theoretical concepts such as hybridity, residual, dominant and emergent. Raymond Williams, Homi.K.Bhabha, and Stuart Hall have elaborately discussed about the 'in-between' spaces in their writings. Baba's concept of hybridity is closely associated with 'third space' which is in between the subject and their idealized other. Hybridity, here refers to mixing of eastern and western culture and traditions. In the novel, *The Kite Runner* Hosseini embodies hybridity through the character, Aamir and Baba. When they leave Afghanistan and settles in America. Where they follow both Afghan as well as American culture, they are not forced to adopt this culture, rather they themselves get adopted to it. The novel revolves around father-son relationship, friendship, caste, repentance and brave. The novel occasionally talks about communal issues. The Muslim community is divided into two Pashtuns high class Muslim and Hazara low class Muslim. So, the present study entirely devotes itself to the study of hybridity in the novel.

Keywords: Hybridity, culture ethnicity, dominant, residual, and emergent.

Hybridity is a term gained popularity from postcolonial studies. *Hybridity* refers to mixing of east and western culture interconnected with race, language, and ethnicity. The term *Hybridity* has its origin from biology. In biology, *Hybridity* means intermingling of different species, plants and animals to produce 'new' species. It is used in English since early 17th Century and gained popular in 19th Century. The notion of Hybrid identity can be seen in the work of Russian literary critic and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who used the notion in the forming the key concepts "Carnivelesque and Dialogism". In Postcolonial context, the term is

closely associated with HomiBhabha, who uses the term to stress interdependence of colonizer and colonized, and to therefore argues that one cannot claim a 'purity' of racial or national identity.

The identity which Bhabha talks about is closely associated with the notion 'third space' which is in between the subject and their idealized other. Critics like Aijaz Ahmad, Chandra TalpadeMohanty, and Benita Tarry have also talked about the concept. The principal theorists of Hybridity are HomiBhabha, Nestor Garcia Canclini, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams. The key text for understanding Hybridity is *Location of Culture* of HomiBhabha. Hybridization takes place many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, and racial. Bhabha states that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space called "The Third Space of Enunciation". (37)

Hybridity is an enticing idea in postcolonial studies. *Hybridity* includes terms such as diaspora, metissage, creolization, and transculturation. *Hybridity* can be argued as a theoretical concept and a political stance and as a social reality with historical specificity. Raymond Henry Williams (1921-1988) was a Welsh Marxist theorist, novelist and critic. He is well known for 'cultural studies'. Most of his works laid the foundations for the field of cultural studies and the cultural materialist approach.

William also describes Culture and mixing of cultures. Raymond defines culture as "the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life" (68). William divides culture into three terms: ideal, documentary and social. The term ideal describes culture as a "state of process of human perfection" (69). He considers culture to be something that does not stands stable rather it keeps on changing. Raymond describes culture as the body of intellectual and imaginative work. Earlier, human thoughts and experience were recorded. Social Science labels culture as a particular way of life.

Mikhail Bakhtin was the first theorist to apply hybridity in *Rabelais and his World* (1965). Post colonial theorists have focused on hybridity which talks between people in colonial and postcolonial contact zones. Hybridity is used in postcolonial discourse to mean cross-cultural exchange.

The novel *The Kite Runner* revolves around themes such as father-son relationship, and Hazara-Pashtuns conflict. Chapter two of the project talks about Hybridity, its origin, concept and how the work

represents hybrid culture. Hybridity plays a major role in this novel. Chapter one of the novel talks about the protagonist Amir Jan who is now twenty-six years old living in San Francisco gets a call from Rahim Khan who is living in Pakistan asks the protagonist to come to Pakistan. When Rahim Khan talks to Amir he goes back to his age of twelve. He hears some voice whispering in his head: “For you, a thousand times over”.

(2)

In chapter two of the novel, Khaled Hosseini has represented Hybridity culturerelating Hassan. Hassan ‘the kite runner’ belongs to two different identities. Khaled Hosseini has talked about this very clearly. Hassan belongs to Shi’a Muslim as well as ethnic Hazara. And in some part of the novel, the reader can see clearly that Hassan and Ali belongs to Hazara community whereas Baba and Amir belongs to Pashtun community. Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi’a. Though they belongs to different community. The love, affection and care shown between two communities have been described here.

Hosseini has talked about two communities Hazara and Pashtuns. In the novel, Hazara community has been shown as an inferior community. Ali, the father of Hassan, belongs to Hazara community and he is attacked by polio in his right leg. Whenever he walks on the street of bazaars or market, the kids on the street mock him by calling him Babalu, or Boogeyman. “Hey, Babalu, who did you eat today?” they barked to a chorus of laughter. “Who did you eat, you flat nosed Babalu?.” (8) Here, the author has talked how cruelly the people of inferior community people are treated.

Stuart Hall borrows the concept *Hybridity* from postcolonial theory to describe the experience of African races which have spread into other cultures and ethnic areas. Hall has used the term in some of his books such as *Minimal Selves* (1988) and *Cultural Identity And Diaspora* (1990). Bhabha expresses *Hybridity* as a state of “inbetweenness” (242), as in a person who stands between two cultures. This concept is applicable to the character Baba, father of Amir, who when left Afghanistan kissed the Afghani dirt and put some in his snuff box to keep next to his heart. “Baba snorted a pinch of his snuff. Stretched his legs. “What’ll save us is eight cylinders and a good carburettor.” That silenced the rest of them for good about the matter of God.” (111) Later, after Baba started to live his life in America he did not completely give up his

Afghanistan culture. Before his death, Baba kept the locket of sand with him. This completely shows, that even after living his half life in America. He did not completely give up his birth land. Here, Baba can be taken as a *Hybridity*. He oscillates between Afghan and American culture and becomes a Hybrid of two cultures.

Raymond Williams was a decisive influence on the formation of cultural studies. According to Williams the word 'culture' meant both 'a whole way of life' (culture in the anthropological sense, synonymous with everyday life) and the forms of signification (novels, films, but also advertising and television) that circulate within a society. According to William Culture is 'a reaction to changes' in the condition of our common life.' (285) Different reactions and cultures have created different cultures. "The idea of culture describes our common inquiry but our conclusions are diverse, as our starting points were diverse. The word, culture, cannot automatically be pressed into service as any kind of social or personal directive." (285)

Raymond Williams write in keywords, "Culture is ordinary, that is where we must start." (76) Culture starts with the world that surrounds us, the social experiences shapes us to which group we belong, or to which group we associate. Culture is not static a unified, but there are always tensions among dominant, residual, and emergent. Raymond Williams book "*Dominant, Residual, and Emergent*", talks about how the dominant people maintain their dominance while other groups contradict or subvert those cultures. The term *Dominant, Residual, and Emergent* are three ideologies of Raymond Williams.

The term 'ideology' has multiple definitions. Raymond Williams defines it in three different ways:

- i. A system of beliefs and characteristics of a particular class or group.
- ii. A system of beliefs which are opposite to true and scientific knowledge.
- iii. The general process of the production of meanings and ideas.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel defined ideology as “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production.” (30)

The dominant culture in a society refers to language, religion, values, rituals and customs. “The dominant culture is usually in the majority and achieves its dominance by controlling social institutions such as communicational systems, educational institutions, artistic expressions, laws, political processes, and businesses.” (Williams 250) The dominant perspectives are practiced by the ruling class. Usually, the dominant occurs between the high class and low class. The high class people dominate low class. They take rights in their hands. Due to dominant between people even cultures and traditions too are dominated. Sometimes, the dominant is successful and sometimes it is not.

The dominant culture has not only affected particular place. Rather, in some parts of country dominant culture plays a vital role. For example, Africans were dominated by white people. And due to their dominance and the place was ruled by them. The African people did not had any chances to escape from the clutches of white people. So, the blacks were forced to follow the white people cultures and traditions.

In some cases, if a particular community people has less amount of people following their culture then the culture which has majority number of people rules that community and people tend to follow the culture of majority number people culture.

Dominant culture is the culture practiced at the present time. What cannot be expressed or verified in terms of the dominant culture are lived and practiced in the residual and what comes out of the dominant culture as new meanings and values, new practices and relationships are called emergent. (223)

Khaled Hosseini has discussed and epitomised dominant culture in *The Kite Runner* through Talibans. The war started to take place in Afghanistan and was ruled by Russian soldiers. The Talibans or Taleban, are people who refers to themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afganistan (IEA), are a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan currently waging war within that country.

The childhood place of Amir has entirely changed. People use diesel because “the city’s generators are always going down, so electricity is unreliable, and people use diesel fuel.” (227) Earlier, the street of Kabul smelled with lamb kabob. But, the only people who get to eat lamb now are the Taliban. The Taliban’s had Kalashnikovs slung on their shoulders. They all wore beards and black turbans. The Taliban official was Assef. It is he who was ruling people and killing poor women in name of God.

The next section Williams talks about is ‘residual’. Residual is an old cultural practices followed on modern societies consciously or unconsciously. William considers organized religion, rural community, and monarchy as three important residual traits of culture. Residual elements are present within the cultural dominant values. Residual practices may be very old and archaic but still their presence is felt. In other words, residual is what left behind from past. ‘Residual’ can be analogized with ‘Hybridity’ of Bhabha. Both the concepts talk about mixing of two cultures.

William states that residual “has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the person.” (122) A residual culture is different from dominant culture. Some, people tend to mix both cultures and bring out as a new culture. Mixed of two cultures. Raymond Williams defines Residual thus:

Residual does not exist within or alongside the dominant culture. It operates in a process of continual tension, which can take the form of both incorporation and opposition within it, thus proves to be residual. Residual forms are different from archaic ones in that they are still alive; they have use and relevance within contemporary culture (201).

Residual takes two roles. The first role, it corresponds to the dominant culture and acts alongside the dominant and accepts its rules. The second role, takes actions against the dominant. Amir Jan, the central character of novel after living in America, he started to follow the lifestyle of America. But his father, did not completely involve into the culture of America. Though, he was living in America he still sometimes follows Afghanistan culture.

Amir Jan's marriage with Soraya takes place in America but the marriage follows Afghan culture. "According to tradition, Soraya's family would have thrown the engagement party, the Shirini-khori or Eating of the sweets ceremony." (156) In 1983, Amir got graduated from high school at the age of twenty. To celebrate this, Baba took Amir to an Afghan Kabob house in Hayward that night and ordered too much of food. After dinner, Baba took Amir to a bar across the street from the restaurant. Where he bought drinks to other patrons also. This is American lifestyle. Raymond Williams' *residual* and HomiBhabha's *hybridity* can be analogised.

Raymond Williams 'emergent' are "neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses or even cannot recognize." (124) 'Emergent' mean new meanings and values, new practices, new relationship and kinds of relationship are continually being created. In other words, emergent mean new culture. Emergent comes between dominant and residual. Here, in emergent culture is not stable. It keeps on changing.

In the novel, Baba neither follows Afghanistan culture nor American culture. According to Islam, drinking is considered to be a terrible sin; those who drink would answer for their sin in the day of Qiyamat, Judgement Day. A Muslim should do namaz-prayer five times a day. When Amir says to Baba that his teacher Mullah Fatiullah Khan ad taught in class that drinking is sin. Baba says to Amir with his eyes wondered. "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. Do you understand that." (17)

Thus, Mikhail Bakhtin, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and other critical theorists have discussed about the notion of *Hybridity*. But, HomiBhabha's concept of Hybridity is slightly different from the rest of the theories. Bhabha, being a postcolonialist, connects culture with Postcolonialism. In postcolonial context, the term implies "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. The term refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species." (Ashcroft 108). According to Julian Wulfrey, "the term has been employed in postcolonialism, particularly in the work of HomiBhabha, to signify a reading of identities which foregrounds the work of difference in identity resistant to the imposition of fixed, unitary identification which is, in turn, a hierarchical location of the colonial or subaltern subject" (51).

As Wulfrey points out, HomiBhabha uses the term to denote the kind of identity which is resistant to the fixed stable identity which is forced upon the subaltern subject. The subject becomes resilient by assuming hybrid identity. Pramod K. Nayar also discusses the resistance shown by the hybrid identity thus: “HomiBhabha sees hybridity as an empowering condition where both cultural purity and cultural diversity are rejected. Hybridity thus becomes a means of resisting a unitary identity, emphasizing instead multiplicity and plural identities, existing between cultures (native and colonial masters), in what Bhabha has called the ThirdSpace.” (92). Therefore, it is evident that cultural blend creates resistance.

Apart from resistance, the concept, *Hybridity* refers to the state of being ‘in-between’. MichealPyne explains *Hybridity* as, “the idea of occupying in-between spaces” (339). Bhabha also has mentioned hybridity as in-between space. According to Bhabha Hybridity can be defined in the following manner:

Liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (5).

J.A.Cuddon defines Hybridity as a space where “colonizer and colonized may well adopt (and in many instances be forced to adopt) the cultural practices of the other” (344). Therefore, it is clear that the in-between culture is called as *Hybridity*. As Chris Barker says, though “[though] hybridization involves the mixing together of that which is already a hybrid. Nevertheless, the concept of hybridity has enabled us to recognize the production of new identities and cultural forms...the concept of hybridity is acceptable as a device to capture cultural change by way of a strategic cut or temporary stabilization of cultural categories” (90).

HomiBhabha’s use of the term *Hybridity* can be distinguished from other theorists with subtle difference. Ian Buchanan’s simple interpretation: “a global state of mixedness, mixedness of culture, race,

ethnicities, nation and so on” (237) as well as David Macey’s complicated definition: “hybridity is the margin where cultural differences come into contact and conflict, and unsettle all the stable identities that are constructed around the opposite” (192) can be taken as good explanations of the term. As David Macey says, it is a margin where to polarities or binary oppositions meet. The postmodern notion of ‘decentring the centre’ has also crept into postcolonial studies. Therefore, fixed identity is deconstructed and fluid, mixed identity is celebrated. To conclude, Hybridity is just a simple mixture of two things or two state of being to create a new one, which cannot be categorised under any one category. The reason for celebrating the notion is, it creates a resistance in the colonized who cannot be under the categorical polarity given by the colonizer. The present research focuses on how the text analogises with the concept of *Hybridity* and how the characters are *Hybrid* in nature. Since, it is a Diasporic literature, Hybrid culture may found frequently.

The notion of Hybridness can be even found from the beginning of the novel itself. Hassan embodies hybridity by being a servant as well as a friend of Aamir. Here, Hassan is in the liminal space where he possesses two identities. When Aamir is asked about Hassan, Aamir says: “But he’s not my friend! I almost blurted. He’s my servant! Had I really thought that? Of course I hadn’t. I hadn’t. I treated Hassan well, just like a friend, better even, more like a brother.”(33). Hassan also says “Aamir Agha and I are friends” (58), when Assef asks about Aamir. Here, Hassan is a hybrid, who is friend as well as a Servant. Hassan’s father Ali also forms hybrid by being a friend of Baba as well as being servant of the house. Hosseini mentions that “Ali and Baba grew up together as childhood playmates. Baba would laugh and throw his arm around Ali.” (21), yet Baba is a servant of Baba’s family. Therefore, he takes up hybrid identity.

The Ali and Hassan become hybrid by having two different identities. Moreover, Hassan is racial hybridity because of his birth. His mother is a Hazara and his father is Pashtun; therefore, he has two racial identities. Apart from race, he is son and servant of Baba, thus he possesses two identities. He oscillates between being a son and being a servant and comes to a hybrid space. Hassan and Aamir have mixed identities. Hassan is the half-brother of Aamir; here, being half-brother forms hybridness. Hassan is half-brother and half-stranger. When Wahid asks about Hassan, Aamir reveals that “He was my half-brother...My illegitimate half -brother.” (210).

Baba is a Muslim but he is against the Muslim mullahs. Baba is this both Muslim and non-Muslim. He drinks, smokes, spend money on gambling, and does a lot against Muslim doctrine, yet he is a Muslim. Thus Baba is oscillating between being a Muslim and a non-Muslim and that forms a hybrid identity. When Baba talks about Mullahs, he says, “first understand this and understand it now, Aamir: You’ll never learn anything of value from those bearded idiots.” (15). Consequently, Baba behaves as a hybrid. He is both a Muslim and the one who criticizes Muslims. Thus he forms hybrid identity.

The novel talks about past history of Afghanistan and Hazara race, it is a hybrid Mongolian race, which formulates hybridity in race. Moreover, when Aamir demands that Hassan should be sent out of the house, his father says, Hassan is also the part of their family; therefore, he becomes a relation here. Hassan is a servant as well as the part of the family. Thus, he farms hybridness. The lifestyle of Afghanistan is already hybrid. Assef is a symbol of hybrid, who has German and Afghan parents. Amir narrates that, Assef was “Born to a German mother and Afghan father (31). Assef, like Hassan, is a Hybrid. Moreover, the children play volleyball and soccer, the games of western countries. Mixed of cultural practices and customs can also be taken as hybrid. The culture of Afghanistan is not pure but already the culture of western countries has crept into Afghanistan. The way people speak, dress, eat, celebrating party culture, their ideologies exemplify the mixed of culture in Afghanistan. Though the Taliban tried to decolonize and purify the culture by imposing traditional way of dressing and lifestyle they themselves follow the culture of west. Thus, the whole setting is a hybrid.

The General, father of Soraya, is a hybrid, who is living in Afghanistan he has the residual quality of Afghanistan in him. General has migrated to America but he always a dream to return to Afghanistan. Does he is both an Afghani and an American. Soraya is also a hybrid being, because Soraya is actually from Afghanistan but she has adopted the culture of America. Aamir also has adopted the culture of America. Thus Aamir and Soraya are hybrid in nature. They have both Afghani and American culture within them. Baba feels difficult, at first, to adopt himself to the culture of America. It is evident that by adopting the culture of America, Baba takes Aamir to the bar after his graduation. Celebrating happy moments in bar is a culture of America. In spite of being an Afghani he follows American culture. Baba becomes hybrid by

doing what Americans would do. The General scolds Aamir for talking with his daughter in the open area. Though he is living in America, he is ideologically he follows the tradition of Afghanistan. Thus the General epitomizes hybrid identity. Aamir has been brought up in America but he asks his father to talk with the General asking Soraya's hand. Through this, it is revealed that, though Aamir is in America, he follows the customs of Afghanistan. Soraya has two different cultures in her, she is racially a Pashtun and nationally an Afghani, but she follows American culture and elopes with a boy in America. Soraya, by following both American and Afghan culture forms hybrid identity.

The Taliban soldiers also follow hybrid culture. Though the Taliban soldiers want to purify Afghanistan by decolonizing the culture of west, they follow the culture of west without knowing it. Taliban rebels have radio and Americanized form of weapons made by western countries. Therefore, they are blending with the culture of west. The marriage of Aamir and Soraya is also a hybrid one. They are in America, but they follow the traditional custom of Afghanistan in marriage. Baba, as a hybrid character, oscillates between American culture and the culture of Afghanistan. It is evident that Baba has residual quality of Afghanistan. For instance, Baba has the soil of Afghanistan with him though he is in America. The quality makes Baba a hybrid. Thus, Hosseini has exemplified Hybridity throughout the novel.

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