

# Thematic Concerns in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner

Dr. Anupam Soni

Dept. Of English

BundelkhandCollege

Jhansi (UP)

## Abstract

Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American novelist, has tried his hand to an unlikely setting for literary fiction. It deals with the subjects of ethnic tension, war, rape, and bachcha bazi. The novelist presents the lively picture of war-torn county vis-à-vis. Hosseini acknowledges an intended Western audience as he emphasizes the fact that the novel has helped to make Afghanistan more than 'just another happy, chronically troubled, 'afflicted land' for his readers. As a peripheral writer situated at the central audience, Hosseini occupies a fraught platform in the literary world. He operates within the strange space ostensibly created by globalization and those migratory patterns engendered by conflict. The protagonist, Amir is placed as a witness to the periphery whose insights and perspectives are now modeled after, and intended for, the center. By acknowledging, Amir's limitations in this regard, Hosseini prioritizes the peripheral voice and gives narrative space to those perspectives typically silenced at the center.

**Keywords:** Ethnic, bachcha bazi, Afghanistan, peripheral, protagonist

The title of the novel *The Kite Runner* takes its inspiration from a very popular, traditional, and cultural fun game of South Asia. Kite flying has taken its origin from the arrival of Moguls in the South Asian region extending from Afghanistan to India. Kite flying in Afghanistan is distinct from other countries as there is an aspect of competition of cutting down opponent's kite with glazed and glass strings tied to a paper of piece. Before the entry of the Taliban, kite flying was a part of national games. Through the device of the kite, the novelist implies the various symbolic dimensions of kite flying. The characters in the novel are presented, as being deeply traumatized by their social, and physical environment. The story showcases the complex weave of relationships between the fathers and the sons in its manifested forms: Baba and Amir, Baba and Hassan,

Amir and Sohrab and Hassan and Sohrab. The plot of the story springs up from the kite flying when Hassan, the best kite runner, refuses to hand over the falling kite to Assef as it is a Trophy of honor for his bestie Amir Agha.

*The Kite Runner* deals with the issue of ethnic discrimination in Afghanistan. There is a particular example of the relationship between Pashtuns and Hazara. The writer presents another frame of division between

Islamic fundamentalists, like Amir's teacher, Mullah Fatiullah Khan, and liberal Afghans like Baba. Baba's words in chapter 3, predict the future takeover of Afghanistan by the orthodox fundamentalists. The Taliban, Baba says: " God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands." The writer uses extremely sharp words for the teacher of Amir and those like him and declares them "self-righteous monkeys."

Set in Afghanistan's gloomy recent past in the 1980s, the novel is a living document of the gruesome violent events of unexpected rape of Hassan upper-class local bullies. War, loss of homeland, death of beloved ones, racial discrimination so on so forth. The impact of all these violent events is so overpowering, that it leaves an endless trauma on the psyche of characters in the novel. Based on the ideas of suffering, Buffalo Creek, Kai Erikson distinguishes "collective trauma" from "individual trauma in "Everything in its Past": *"by individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively...by collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it...[is] a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared... 'We' no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body"*

Discriminatory traditions, policies, ideas, and laws existing in many countries of this world, Afghanistan too, had this crucial practice. The two ethnic groups of Afghanistan i.e. Pashtuns and Hazaras are in constant conflict since the 16th century. The basic cause of this conflict can't be directly traced back but the historians spell that after the fall of the Mongolian Genghis Khan, many Mongolians migrated to Afghanistan. Since the Pashtuns belong to the Islamic subsets of Sunnis, they persecuted the Hazaras who belong to the Shia, a significantly minor group.

The novelist through *The Kite Runner* has brought forth the traditions and customs of Afghanistan, their execution in the backdrop of war. He takes the theme of kite-flying to show the ethnic conflict between The Pashtuns and Hazaras. In the novel, Hassan is deprived of his identity, discriminated and insulted. Because of his cleft lip, and his identity as a Hazara, he found it hard to live. In his own land, he is bullied by older boys like Assef.

During his rape, Amir hides from the site and stands witness to this horrible act, signifying his cowardice, without intervention:

"I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That is what I made myself believe. I aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: nothing was free in this

world. Maybe Hassan was the price, I had to pay, the lamb. I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara. Wasn't he?"

Even though, the novelist doesn't talk much about the female characters and their prolonged absence from the main narrative can be felt. Mothers and wives, for instance. Play second fiddle to the-male Protagonists though not by any conscious decision of their own rather it is Afghan society itself that marginalizes them and impedes their personal development. Amir's mother, Sofia Akrami, "hemorrhaged to death during childbirth." Hassan lost his mother "to a fate most Afghans considered far worse than death. She ran off with a clan of traveling singers and dancers. In the case of Amir's mother, the neglect of women's reproductive health and poor access to life-saving medical care turns pregnancy into a possible death sentence. Far from being rare, this tragedy accurately reflects the fact that maternal mortality remains the leading cause of death among women of childbearing age in Afghanistan. These references to Amir's mother and Hassan's mother justify the subservient status of women in Afghanistan. Sanauber escaped from home and returning to her son is probably because of her sense of alienation. Maybe, she finds it difficult to share and connect with the people of higher status, she is living with. Be it, her husband or the people, she runs off with. The same sense of alienation is reflected in Sohrab's attitude towards Amir when he is taken to America by Amir. He fails to come to terms with his new parents. The stored memories of his previous life doesn't allow him to accept the strangers' touch and feels uncomfortable with stranger's attention, he flinches back when touched, going for a whole year without speaking to either of his adoptive parents "I am so dirty. And full of sin" he insists.

The kite runner also describes the social alienation which stems from the negligent attitude of society towards the minority groups. In Afghan culture, the people belonging to the Hazara tribe strive for dignity and self-respect. Hassan is constantly referred to as flat-nosed in the story. Both Amir and Hassan are aware of the social and religious differences that define their identities which prevents them from developing a full-fledged friendship.

However, when Amir and his father escape to the US, the theme of cultural estrangement becomes a matter of concern for them. When an individual is compelled to live in an unfamiliar surrounding, they undergo a sense of the second citizen in foreign soil. Similarly, Hazaras suffer due to their race and are treated as thieves and liars, which is the consequence of constructed ideology.

"America was different. America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins. If for nothing else, for that I embraced America." After returning to his native land Amir learns from Rahim Khan

That:

The Russian invasion, additionally, paints life in Afghanistan to be a highly negative experience with "Roussy soldiers patrolling the streets" keeping order and taking away any freedom that the Afghans had.

After the Russian invasion, The Taliban takes over, which is expected to be A miracle, even Rahim Khan "danced" in the streets and he "wasn't alone" and the people thought that this was a positive thing. Initially, the Taliban described as "heroes", however later they are likened to a "rabid dog" indicating their negative effect on the country. The Taliban treat Afghans that appear to challenge their rules violently, resulting in the death of Hassan and the beating of his wife after she spoke too loudly one day at a market, she was given a "large purple bruise", showing how restrictive and violent Taliban is. Returning back to his home and finding Hassan nowhere, Rahim Khan clears..

"A pair of Taliban Official's came to investigate and interrogated Hassan. They accused him of lying when Hassan told them that he was living with me ..... The Talibs said he was a liar and thief like all Hazaras and ordered him to get his family out of the house sun down....."

Rahim Khan highlights the political turmoil of Afghanistan, telling Amir that the Northern alliance has done more damage to Kabul than any other intruder because America is a strong ally to northern allies. America wants Russia to lose the war so that it may invade. It all seemed a great design structured by the superpower. Soviet exclusion puts Afghanistan in the hands of Masood Rabbani and the Mujahedin..

"Our ears became accustomed to the whistling of falling shells, to the rumble of gunfire our eyes familiar with the sight of men digging bodies out of piles of rubble. Kabul in those days Amir Jan, was as close as you could get to the proverbial hell on earth."

Afghans live in "being in pain". There is a colonial occupation "interrogation and beatings curfews" is a normal routine for soldiers. Even they are not safe in their homes terrorised by rocket bombings in the air. Rahim Khan calls history: "when the Taliban rolled in and kicked the alliances out of Kabul, I actually danced on that street." People paid a huge price for war. No one walks out of their home because of the mines in the ground, especially in the fields. They do not come out and die of hunger or "there were body parts of children." The complexity of the human community appears convincing when wars And the power-hunger game transcends continents. Hence, the digital dynamics of world domination reflect all superpowers and the control devices on Earth.

Amir's shame and guilt follows him after he and his father escape to the United States. His guilt is so overpowering that he finds himself betraying Hassan even in his dreams. As a result of that, he becomes an insomniac. The wound of the trauma is not healed until Amir returns to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and risks his life to rescue Sohrab. The sense of sin is hard to forget:

"I loved him in that moment, loved him more than I'd ever loved anyone, and I wanted to tell them all that I was the snake in the grass, the monster in the lake. I wasn't worthy of this sacrifice; I was a liar, a cheat, a thief. And I would have told, except that a part of me was glad. Glad that this would all be over with soon. Baba would dismiss them, there would be some pain, but life would move on. I wanted that, to move on, to forget, to start with a clean slate. I wanted to be able to breathe again."



Another eye-opening issue that is the concern of the novelist is the depiction of adolescent boys trapped in Paedophilia i.e. 'Bacha Bazi'. Hassan's son is the soft target of Assef, the Taliban fundamentalist. The custom of Bacha Bazi is not consensual rather coercion hence equivalent to rape and reflects the grotesque violation of Afghan male children's human rights. The novel reveals the socio-cultural domain of Afghanistan more as a result of the ethnic conflict.

Finally, this paper focuses mainly on the paramedic concerns. The Kite Runner also analyses fragmented stories that make a complete whole to explore issues that have been avoided in popular fictions for a long time. Khalid Hosenni for the very first time has brought forth the real picture of Afghanistan. He has successfully connected passed with the present comprehensively.

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