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Delineation of Societal Conflict, Mental Dilemma, Nostalgic and Tumultuous Life of Afghans in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract:

Afghan literature is produced in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, influenced by Central and South Asian literature. The text is primarily written in Dari and Pashto, the official languages of Afghanistan. Afghanistan, a muslim country, has always been counted as the most barbaric country for humanity worldwide. Jim Fowler remarks: "There is no country in the world that's more devastated from natural resources than Afghanistan". (web). Since its emergence to power in the mid-eighteenth century, Afghanistan had come under the monarchical reign of several monarchs, whose consolidation of power was constantly undermined by civil war and foreign invasions. "The upheavals in Afghanistan are not an Afghan thing. It had its roots outside the country, which eventually led the country to be the hub of terrorism,.....who had a different agenda." (web). After the upheavals societal displacement, political exploitation, gender discrimination, cultural chaos, mental, physical, and emotional turmoil, and many other atrocities have become a common phenomenon in the life of Afghans. These circumstances have shoved Afghanistan into such a dell of hell that human life cannot even be imagined. Some seeds, which surmount similar cataclysmic circumstances, blossomed and gave birth to such a literary medium, which not only voiced out their nostalgic anguish but also unveiled the blemish of contemporary Afghan society. Khaled Hosseini, who emerged from the sludge of the same morass, exposed the dark side of the norms, culture, customs, and traditions of his motherland. Khaled Hosseini's novels articulate the enduring agony of Afghans, who carry the burden of remorse throughout their

existence. The paper interprets the socio-political scenario, traumatic and poignant experiences of human relationships, hollowness of customs, and untold grief of Afghans portrayed in Hosseini's novel 'The Kite Runner' (2003). Hosseini as a writer has offered his infancy world of Afghanistan as a background of his fiction. The novel deals with the theme of societal discrimination, emotional conflict, racism, superego, guilt, atonement, and redemption. It sheds light on human nature by showing the inherent evil that can be evoked, and how it leads to the impairment of childhood innocence and the hardships of entire life. The purpose of this paper ruminates on the social and cultural turmoil of war and foreign invasions and their impact on the lives of ordinary citizens of Afghanistan, especially the societal conflict of Hazaras, the sexual exploitation of Sanubar, the physical and mental trauma of Hassan and his son Shorab, and nostalgia of Amir.

Keywords: Dehumanization, atonement, guilt, dilemma, sexual slavery.

Introduction:

"Life is a dream for the wise, a game for the fool, a comedy for the rich, a tragedy for the poor."

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Sholem Aleichem

The praxis of dehumanization is not a neoteric mephitic for the human phylum. For ages, it has been circumventing the substratum of the human species and its upcoming generations. Afghanistan, since its infancy, has had the same kind of problems with its culture, customs, and soil. The Taliban have imposed a harsh interpretation of Islamic law despite pledges to respect the rights of women and religious and ethnic minority communities. Meanwhile, as they have transitioned from an insurgent group to a functional government. In Afghanistan religion, caste, and physical disabilities were the vital sources of conflict between the two groups because the Pashtuns belong to the Sunni sect while the Hazaras are the Shias. Moreover, the physical features of the Hazaras, their Mongoloid looks, have made them easily distinguishable from the rest of the Afghan populace. In every social structure, class is an important factor that determines a person's position in society. Afghanistan is not an exception in this aspect. In a country like Afghanistan has never conducted a full census, and it is thus difficult to gauge the number of casualties suffered in the country since the outbreak of fighting. Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist, was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. Later, in 1980, his family asked for political asylum in the United States of America. By then, Afghanistan had already suffered a ruthless communist takeover and the incursion of the Soviet army, the American invasion followed by the dreadful

reign of the Taliban. Hosseini employs the strategy of showing a grave and menacing political scenario through a popular culture of novel writing. The Taliban's control and the extremists' intervention in Afghan political, social, cultural, religious, and economic matters are other prominent themes highlighted by Hosseini in his novels.

'The Kite Runner' deals with a land in turmoil and shows how a previously peace-loving liberal nation has changed into a theocratic orthodox nation, how the marginalized ethnic community of Hazaras is listed down upon segregated, mutilated humiliated, and traumatized. The novel tells the eternal saga of friendship, betrayal, love, hatred, sin, and emancipation. It is a multi-layered narrative that digs deep into the memories of the protagonist Amir, an Afghan boy born to an extremely affluent family who was one of the lakhs of homeless migrants to find refuge in tar-trodden Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini in, *The Kite Runner*, uses the complex emotional bond between fathers and sons to demonstrate the necessity of an empathetic fatherly figure. The novel opens with a phone call conversation between Amir and Rahim Khan. To Amir, it was not just a phone call by Rahim but rather a call by the past of his unatoned sins. He not only recalls all the bitter and sweet events throughout his life, but also, we see the untold grief of Afghans which can tear anyone's heart. The novel unveiled the vices of Afghan society where lower caste people and people with physical disabilities are treated as subhuman. It is a searing tale of Hassan and his son Sohrab, that throughout their life they are abused physically as well as mentally. The story is built on the parameters of relationship, betrayal, and redemption. When Rahim Khan calls Amir to save Sohrab from the clutches of Taliban autocrats though he initially reluctantly agrees, later he stakes his life to save his nephew. The mortal injuries he got in that event serve as a panacea to all his previous guilt. When he finds out about the sexual violation of Sohrab by the same violator Assef, he gets traumatized. It is as if his past guilts come to the forefront and confront him. He represses memories of sexual encounters with Sanubar and having an illegitimate child always haunts him. He also betrayed Ali's friendship and the betrayal presents himself as an alter ego to Amir as he too betrayed Hassan. Amir always tried to escape from his memories about his homeland, and Baba used to lament for them in an alien space: "For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his" (Hosseini,2013 p.120). The former deeds of Amir and Baba now haunt them like a needle and do not let them take a single breath of satisfaction. The novel shows the differentiation between the powerful dictators of the country and society and the lower middle-class citizens. The novel "Kite Runner" is a lively testimony and the painful voice

of hundreds of Afghan people, whose bodies and souls were selectively eaten by their powerful Afghan vultures. At the beginning of the novel "Kite Runner" we see that when Hassan and Ali take a shortcut to enjoy a new Iranian film, a Russian soldier stops them with obscenities. "You! The Hazara! Look at me when I'm talking to you!" He bothers them badly and makes nasty comments that hurt more than any pain for any child. "I knew your mother; did you know that? I knew her real good. I took her from behind by that creek over there" (Hosseini,2013. p.5). It can be seen in these lines that Hasan's mother Sanubar was sexually abused by a Russian soldier. He faces mental trauma and heart-wrenching agony when the Russian soldier insults and humiliates him and his mother. The soldier assaults the honour of his mother: "What a tight sugary cunt she had!" (Hosseini,2013. p.5). It shows the mental dilemma of Hassan that he was going through. This mental anguish was molesting him inside because he could not even tell his pain to anyone. "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you". (Maya Angelou, web)

Afghanistan was full of chaos, societal rush, and discrimination. In the novel, Rahim Khan and Amir feel nostalgic when they revisit their past deeds and memories. Rahim Khan revisits the nostalgic memories of his Hazara beloved. Nevertheless, of his family's stern views, the Hazara lady and her family were put into exile. The Afghan society only knew how to harass the Eunuchs, not to support them. Amir is also seen repenting for his betrayal and atrocities committed in his childhood. Through Amir's flashback, the novel shows the societal and mental conflict of weaker Afghan people. Powerful people always exploit, torture, and molest the weaker people. Sometimes they hurt them with hoarse words sometimes teas , while sometimes they abused physically. Hassan, as a Hazara, faces the burnt of being born into a minority group. The world of discrimination, hatred, marginalization, and trauma opens up to him after his encounter with Assef. The latter was intolerant to Hazaras and hence often addressed Hassan as a "donkey" Assef's hatred against the Hazaras is explicitly visible when he claims Afghanistan as a land of Pashtuns. He reprimands Amir, "If idiots like you and your father didn't take these people in, we'd be rid of them by now". (Hosseini,2013 p,39) we are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-nose here. These people pollute our homeland. It shows that lower-class people are never treated equal to other citizens. Sometimes, weaker Afghan people were molested due to their identity, and sometimes they were abused due to the betrayal of their companions. In the novel, we see that for Hassan, Amir is his alter ego but Amir treats Hassan just as a slave. Hassan takes risks to help Amir by Amir doesn't support him when he is in a problem. Hassan could never fathom the

repercussions of his attempt to save Amir. His act of protecting Amir from the invincible leader, Assef, undesirably challenged the latter. The wounded Assef warns Amir and Hassan, “Your Hazara made a big mistake today, Amir”. Amir remembers the winter of 1975 when he “saw Hassan run a kite for the last time” Amir won the kite tournament but the last kite had to be produced as a symbol of victory and was also considered a prized possession. Hassan, the greatest kite runner runs to grab the kite for his ardent master and friend, Amir. As soon as he reaches for the kite, he finds himself trapped by Assef and his friends in an alley, then he is given a wound that hurts him for the rest of his life. Assef sexually abuses him: “Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan’s hips, and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan’s back and undid his belt buckle with his free hand. He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn’t struggle. Didn’t even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb”. (Hosseini,2013 p,42) this heinous, pungent, and searing event ruined Hassan's entire life. As Hosseini advocates, “...sometimes even a single day, can change the course of a whole lifetime...” the delineation reflects the lucid picture of Hassan’s heart-wrenching agony and physical and mental trauma. During the incident, the betrayal of Amir rips apart their friendship. But Amir had no regrets, to console and comfort his guilt he justifies his cowardice act as: “He was just a Hazara, wasn’t he?” (Hosseini,2013 p,49) As the story proceeds, their physical and mental conditions of Amir begin to vex and deteriorate as the memory of the incident continuously haunts him. In the bizarre mental state, Amir even started believing that keeping a distance from Hassan would make him feel better. So, to get rid of Hassan, he attempted to hide his father’s money and watch under Hassan’s bed hoping that his father would expel Hassan and his father from the job as he knew his father hates theft as a sin. On the other hand, Hassan sacrificing his father’s honor and job confesses that he has stolen the money and watch, but Amir’s father forgives him considering him a small child. But Hassan takes leave with his father as Amir tells his father Ali about what happened on the day of the tournament. The courage to tell his father about the incident frees him from the haunting guilt but for a very short period.

The exploitation of Sohrab reflects the plight of the weaker sex in Afghan society. The novel ruminates that ‘There is only one sin, only one and that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft. When you kill a man, you steal a life. You steal his wife’s right of a husband; you rob his children of a father. When you lie you steal someone’s right to truth. When you cheat, you steal

the right to fairness. There is no more wretched act than stealing. A man who takes what is not his to take, be it life or a loaf of naan, I spit on such a man. And if I ever cross paths with him, God helps him. It's a piece of advice given by Baba to Amir, that becomes deeply ingrained in his psyche during his childhood, only to leave him baffled at a later stage of life, when he discovers that Hassan is his brother, an illegitimate child of his father, a secret Baba kept from Amir till he breathed his last. Amir is left completely bereft of an answer to why Baba stole his right to know the truth, a man who always advocated speaking the truth and considered 'theft' to be the worst crime of all. The author has exposed the hypocrisy and cowardice of Baba in a subtle way, leaving readers in a curious state of mind to reflect and analyze how Baba deceived Amir and deprived him of his rights.

To know the truth. It was Baba's harshness and lack of affection towards Amir, which was the result of his self-sacrifice, guilt and lack of courage to tell the deeper things. The secret of his life to his son, a truth that is inextricably linked with both of their lives. Baba, Amir and Hassan. Poor Hassan ends up as the victim, suffering throughout his life and eventually sacrificing his life at the hands of the Taliban. (Hosseini, p.123)

The novel exhibits powerlessness and poverty responsible for the spread of the chaos in Afghanistan. Beleaguered Afghans watched children being treated as commodities; mistreated and abused. Amir finds Sohrab turned into a dancing boy by the Taliban warlord, who is no one else but Assef. Assef's immense hatred which he carried against the Hazaras didn't diminish a bit as an adult. Because of this he also brutally rapes Sohrab. Sohrab dressed as a woman, was brought before the Talib. He was "dressed in loose, sapphire blue Sirhan-turban" (Hosseini, 2013, p.160) "His head was shaved, his eyes darkened with mascara, and his cheeks glowed with an unnatural red. (Ibid, p,157) Amir watched Hassan dance in front of Talibs: Sohrab raised his arms and turned slowly. He stood on tip-toes, spun gracefully, dipped to his knees, straightened, and spun again.....he kept his eyes closed" (Ibid.p.) Sohrab seems to be enveloped by humiliation and fear in such an abysmal condition. The presence of Talib scares him and instills him with the horrors of sexual assault. Sohrab represents the plight of Hazara boys who are poor orphans and hence are easily accessible to the warlords. Amir could explicitly see the sensual advances made by the Talib towards Sohrab. His reference to Sohrab as 'my Hazara boy' affirms his treatment of the child as his possession. "Bia, bia, my boy," the Talib said, calling Sohrab to him. Sohrab went to him, head down, and stood between his thighs. The Talib wrapped his arms around the boy. "How talented

he is, nay, my Hazara boy!” he said. His hands slid down the child’s back, then up, felt under his armpits. One of the guards elbowed the other and snickered” (Ibid. p,151) Talib’s fondling of Sohrab displays his sexual perversity. Sohrab gets so tired and horrified by sexual slavery that he tries to commit suicide. Amir recalls Sohrab’s body floating in the bathtub of the hotel room, “the water drops dripping from the faucet and dangling over the side of the tub, the blood-soaked razor sitting on the toilet tank.....and his eyes, still open but lightless” (Ibid. p,178) the novel ends on a positive note when Amir finally gets a success in lighting a spark in the eyes of Sohrab through the kite flying activity organized at a gathering of Afghans at Fremont. It depicts Amir taking over the role of Hassan, Kite Runner, who was trying to win back the lost life of Sohrab. “For you, a thousand times over,” I heard myself say” (Ibid. p,203)

At a very young age culture and our surroundings teach us that we must keep family close. The thought of family unity many times will make or break a child. If a child experiences family separation, it can greatly impact their home life. Family ties run deep no matter what culture one is a part of; it just seems to be more evident in the Afghan culture. In the Afghan culture, a dominant sense of the primary importance of family causes children to want nothing more than to impress their parents. To impress one’s parents in any culture much less the Afghan culture may be one of the biggest most proud moments of a child’s life. Such is true when the boys win the kite-running competition. Amir wants nothing more than to impress his father and keep the family name alive and strong. The Importance of Family The value of family seems to be obvious in every culture around the world.

The Kite Runner is set against the backdrop of political turmoil in Afghanistan, from the overthrow of the monarchy in the 1970s to the rise of the Taliban regime in the 1990s. Some Afghans believed that the rise of the Taliban would be a beneficial change since the Taliban were a local group of competent fighters heavily committed to religious principles. Almost immediately, however, the Taliban came to be as destructive a force in Afghanistan as the Soviet occupiers had been. The Taliban embraced a desire to destroy all aspects of Afghan culture that they believed were not compatible with a strict, perverted interpretation of Islam. As Amir was always perceived as less than perfect to his indifferent father, the feat of becoming closer to him resulted in a deception that would affect the next few decades of his life. The novel continues to focus on Amir’s

story integrated with Afghan culture and insight into various aspects of life during the years of the country's perishing monarchy and devastating warfare.

Some people believe that it is possible to bury the past and never go back to it, but the novel shows it is not until you seek atonement for your mistakes and sins that your past will be able to be forgotten and left to rest in peace. By making Amir and Baba deal with their guilt and developing their process of redemption, Hosseini delivers the message that making mistakes is human and that redemption from past mistakes is always possible. The novel vividly portrays the bloodshed and scars of war-torn Afghanistan. The novel depicts the plight of a nation ravaged by war and the brutalities inflicted on its people from time to time, the exodus of Afghan people to Pakistan and the United States as a ramification of Soviet invasion, massacres of oppressed and marginalized Hazara people under the tyranny of the Taliban.

Conclusion:

Khaled Hossaini's *The Kite Runner* is a devastating tale of betrayal, guilt, and redemption that depicts the horrific realities of a war-torn Afghanistan. The novel encompasses Afghanistan's history in a nutshell. It is a window to the social complexities, political upheavals, and racial discrimination emerging out of the chaotic conditions prevailing during the Taliban regime. "people say that eyes are windows to the soul". (web)Afghanistan with multi multi-ethnic fabric, has always been struggling with the crisis of racism and creating the ideology of a nation. The Afghan society is experiencing an increase in ethnic pride and affinity, leading to heightened intolerance between ethnic groups. "There are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood". (web)As we see in the novel, Hazaras are treated as slaves of Pashtuns whose only purpose is to serve Pashtuns, as in the novel, every Hazara character is a servant of Pashtuns. Furthermore, Hazaras are objectified in the novel sexually from time to time and from generation to generation. Many people including Baba had sexually exploited Sanobar. Later on, her son Hassan was brutally raped by Assef for being Hazara, then his son Sohrab was sexually abused by the Taliban for his identity as Hazara. The people of Afghanistan live with uncertainty and fear after witnessing war and the destruction of families, culture, and communities. In Afghanistan, victims are those who have witnessed traumatic events, lived through horrific situations, and lived with the memories of trauma. Fear and being victims of war affect the psyche of individuals and communities, causing trauma. The transformation of individual or group identity in memory of

pain allows us to empathize with humanity's suffering and find a way to be better. The ironical analysis of the novel has been observed in the paper that Muslims are brutally tortured by Muslims in a Muslim country just because of different ideologies. While male members are abused more brutally than a woman can think about to live life. And if we talk about the perspective of women, then their exploitation multiplies more than a thousand times. They are just sexual slaves. No one cares about the suffering of the victims, even they don't care about morality. The life of Afghan people can be compared to what T. S. Eliot remarked: "We are in rats' alley" (web). The sycophants of the society mislead people in the name of religion. Shias and Sunni Muslims are treated differently even though they all follow the teachings of the Quran. Because of this, women, the lower and weaker sections of society are treated in such a way that no one can even imagine living a life. There will be no exaggeration that if the inferno exists anywhere on this earth that can be called in Afghanistan as the complete denial of humanity.

"When Allah had made the rest of the world, He saw that there was a lot of rubbish left over, bits and pieces and things that did not fit anywhere else. He collected them all together and threw them down to the earth. That was Afghanistan". (web).

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