



ISSN 2455-7544
www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Daath Voyage : An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English

A Refereed Open Access Journal
Vol 9 No 1 March 2024

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: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.9, No.1, March, 2024

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: An Intimate Glimpse of the Heartache and Backdrop of Tumultuous Event of Afghan Society

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Abstract: Afghan literature is richly influenced by the cultures of Central and South Asia, and it is primarily written in Dari and Pashto, the official languages of Afghanistan. However, it is important to note that Afghanistan has faced significant challenges throughout its history. It has experienced civil wars, foreign invasions, and societal upheavals that have caused displacement, exploitation, discrimination, and immense suffering for its people. In this context, Khaled Hosseini, a prominent Afghan writer, has emerged to shed light on the dark side of Afghan society. His novels, such as "The Kite Runner" (2003), delve into the socio-political climate, traumatic human experiences, cultural conflicts, and grief that Afghans have endured. Through his writing, Hosseini expresses the enduring agony that burdens Afghans, as they navigate the complexities of their existence. "The Kite Runner" specifically explores themes of societal discrimination, emotional conflict, racism, guilt, atonement, and redemption. The novel exposes the inherent evil that can be evoked in human nature, leading to the loss of childhood innocence and the enduring struggles faced throughout one's life. This paper aims to delve into the socio-political turmoil caused by war and foreign invasions, examining their profound impact on the lives of ordinary Afghan citizens. It will explore the societal conflict faced by the Hazaras, the sexual exploitation of characters like Sanubar, the physical and mental trauma endured by characters like Hassan and his son Shorab, and the nostalgia experienced by the protagonist, Amir. By unraveling these themes and exploring the characters' experiences, the paper seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the social and cultural challenges faced by Afghans in the midst of war and upheaval. Ultimately, the intention is to create a more effective narrative surrounding the traumatic experiences depicted in Hosseini's novel.



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Keywords: Grappled, atonement, backdrop, marginalization, redemption.

Introduction

Life is a dream for the wise, a game for the fool, a comedy for the rich, a tragedy for the poor.” --
Sholem Aleichem

The dehumanization of individuals and groups has been a longstanding issue that has plagued humanity throughout history. Afghanistan, from its early days, has grappled with cultural, societal, and political challenges. The Taliban, despite their claims to respect the rights of women and minority communities, have enforced a harsh interpretation of Islamic law. As they transitioned from an insurgent group to a governing body, their influence has cast a shadow on the country's cultural, religious, and ethnic landscape. Religious differences, such as the Sunni and Shia divide between the Pashtuns and Hazaras respectively, have fueled conflict in Afghanistan. Additionally, the distinctive physical features of the Hazaras, with their Mongoloid appearance, have made them easily identifiable and subject to discrimination. Social class is another significant factor that determines one's position in Afghan society, as it does in many other social structures. Afghanistan lacks a comprehensive census, making it challenging to accurately gauge the number of casualties and the extent of suffering caused by ongoing conflicts. Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist born in Kabul in 1965, experienced firsthand the tumultuous political climate in his home country. His family sought political asylum in the United States in 1980, amid the brutal communist takeover, Soviet invasion, American intervention, and subsequent Taliban rule. Hosseini adopts the strategy of using popular novel writing to portray the grave and menacing political landscape of Afghanistan. He sheds light on the Taliban's control and extremist interference in various aspects of Afghan life, including politics, society, culture, religion, and the economy. Through his novels, Hosseini brings attention to these prominent themes, offering insights into the complexities and challenges faced by Afghans. The analysis of Hosseini's work reveals a profound examination of the political turmoil and influences that have shaped Afghanistan's history. By employing the medium of popular fiction, he effectively communicates the consequences of Taliban rule and extremist intervention in Afghan society, culture, and everyday life.



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Vol.9, No.1, March, 2024

The Kite Runner is a powerful novel that delves into the complex themes of friendship, betrayal, love, and redemption. Set against the backdrop of a tumultuous Afghanistan, it explores the transformation of a once peace-loving nation into a theocratic society, as well as the mistreatment and marginalization of the Hazara ethnic community. The story follows Amir, a privileged Afghan boy who eventually becomes a homeless refugee in his own country. 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. 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



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ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

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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 honour 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 endured by Sohrab serves as a poignant reflection of the dire circumstances faced by the weaker sex within Afghan society. In the novel, an insightful rumination surfaces, asserting that theft stands as the singular sin, with all other transgressions merely variations of this act. Through this lens, it becomes apparent that every time a life is taken, a husband's rights are stolen from his wife, and a father is robbed from his children. Each lie perpetuates the stealing of someone's right to truth, while cheating strips away the entitlement to fairness. Indeed, stealing is the epitome of wretchedness, and those who brazenly appropriate what is not rightfully



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ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

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theirs are deserving of contempt. This wisdom, imparted by Baba to Amir during their shared past, becomes deeply ingrained within Amir's psyche. However, it leaves him utterly confounded when he discovers that Hassan, his childhood friend and servant, is in fact his half-brother – a secret his late father, Baba, has kept hidden. And so, a profound question lingers: why did Baba steal Amir's right to know the truth, particularly given his staunch advocacy for honesty and his vehement condemnation of theft? The author subtly exposes the hypocrisy and cowardice of Baba, leaving readers in a state of introspection, compelling them to contemplate how Baba's deception deprived Amir of his fundamental right to knowledge. It was this lack of affection and harshness displayed by Baba towards Amir that ultimately stemmed from a place of self-sacrifice, guilt, and a profound lack of courage to reveal the deep-seated truths that intertwined their lives. In the web of secrets that engulfed Baba, Amir, and Hassan, the unfortunate victim turned out to be poor Hassan, who suffered throughout his life and eventually made the ultimate sacrifice at the hands of the Taliban . Thus, the narrative adeptly highlights the far-reaching consequences of deceit, exposing the tragic repercussions borne by those innocent souls ensnared in a web spun by others. 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 clad 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” (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” (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” (203) .

From the young age, we are taught the significance of family and the impact it has on shaping our lives. This notion holds true across cultures, but perhaps nowhere is it more evident than in Afghan culture. Family ties run deep in Afghanistan, and the unity or separation of a family can have a profound effect on a child's upbringing and home life. In the Afghan culture, the importance of family is ingrained in every aspect of life. Children are raised with the belief that their ultimate goal is to impress and make their parents proud. This is particularly highlighted in "The Kite Runner" when Amir, the protagonist, longs to win the kite-running competition to gain the admiration of his father and uphold the family name. This desire to please and align with familial expectations is a significant driving force for many children, and achieving recognition from their parents becomes a moment of great pride. However, the backdrop against which this story unfolds is one of political turmoil and upheaval in Afghanistan. From the overthrow of the monarchy in the 1970s to the rise of the Taliban regime in the 1990s, the country experiences continuous waves of instability. At first, some Afghans believed that the Taliban's rise to power would bring positive change, as they were seen as competent fighters deeply committed to religious principles. Unfortunately, their reign quickly turns destructive, resembling the Soviet occupiers who preceded them. Under the Taliban, Afghan culture is threatened, and the values and traditions that hold families together are targeted for eradication. They impose a strict and distorted interpretation of Islam, aiming to destroy any aspects of



Afghan culture that they deem incompatible with their beliefs. This further heightens the importance of family, as Afghans cling to their customs and family bonds as a means of preservation amidst the chaos. For Amir, the pursuit of familial acceptance takes a deceptive turn as he seeks to bridge the gap and satisfy his father's expectations. This deception sets off a chain of events that will shape the next few decades of his life. Throughout the novel, readers gain insight into various aspects of Afghan culture, witnessing the decline of the monarchy, the ravages of war, and the resilience of a people determined to safeguard their heritage. "The Kite Runner" shines a light on the intricate relationship between culture and family, emphasizing the immense value placed on family unity in Afghan society. It underscores the complexities and challenges faced by individuals like Amir as they navigate the intricacies of cultural expectations and strive for familial recognition in a world plagued by conflict and upheaval.

Khaled Hosseini's critically acclaimed novel, "The Kite Runner," delves into the depths of human emotion and explores the multifaceted issues plaguing Afghanistan during a tumultuous period in its history. Through the lens of the protagonist, Amir, the reader is exposed to the devastating consequences of betrayal, guilt, and the potential for redemption. Afghanistan, a country with a rich and diverse ethnic makeup, has long grappled with racial tensions and the struggle to forge a national identity. Hosseini masterfully captures these complexities by highlighting the divide between the Pashtuns, who hold power and privilege, and the Hazaras, who are marginalized and mistreated. Hazaras are often depicted as subservient to Pashtuns, serving them as loyal servants. This portrayal exposes the inherent racism and discrimination present within Afghan society. Moreover, the novel tackles the issue of sexual objectification and abuse within the context of Afghanistan's deeply patriarchal society. Characters like Sanobar, a Hazara woman, are victims of sexual exploitation by powerful figures such as Baba. This cycle continues as Hassan, Sanobar's son and Amir's loyal friend, falls victim to a brutal rape by Assef, a prominent bully. The trauma inflicted on individuals like Hassan and his son Sohrab highlight the harrowing experiences faced by many Afghan citizens. The backdrop of war and violence in Afghanistan further amplifies the suffering endured by its people. The destruction of families, culture, and communities leaves a lasting impact on individuals' psyches. The constant uncertainty and fear become ingrained in



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ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.9, No.1, March, 2024

their daily lives, leading to widespread trauma. The collective trauma experienced by Afghan society shapes their identities and fosters an environment of pain and resilience.

In Khaled Hosseini's thought-provoking novel, the idea of burying the past without seeking atonement is challenged. Through the journeys of the main characters, Amir and Baba, the author highlights the importance of confronting guilt and actively seeking redemption in order to free oneself from the burdens of the past. The novel delves deep into the human psyche, illustrating that making mistakes is an inherent part of being human. Both Amir and Baba are flawed individuals who carry the weight of their past actions. They grapple with guilt and the consequences of their choices, ultimately realizing that they cannot simply ignore or suppress their pasts if they truly wish to move forward. Hosseini masterfully guides us through their individual paths of redemption, showing us that it is never too late to make amends and seek forgiveness. As readers, we witness the transformative power of acknowledging one's mistakes and actively working towards reconciliation. This portrayal serves as a powerful reminder that no matter how grave the transgressions, the possibility for redemption always exists. Against the backdrop of war-torn Afghanistan, the novel paints a vivid and harrowing picture of a nation ravaged by violence and trauma. The author skillfully depicts the bloodshed, scars, and lasting impact of war on its people. We witness the exodus of countless Afghan citizens, forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in neighboring countries like Pakistan and the United States due to the devastating Soviet invasion. Hosseini sheds light on the atrocities committed against marginalized groups within Afghan society, such as the Hazara people. The novel unflinchingly portrays the brutalities inflicted upon them under the oppressive rule of the Taliban. Through these portrayals, the author aims to raise awareness about the suffering endured by innocent individuals caught in the crossfire of political turmoil and ideological conflicts.

"The Kite Runner" serves as a poignant reminder that burying the past without seeking atonement is not enough to find true peace. By delving into the journeys of Amir and Baba, Khaled Hosseini conveys the universal message that making mistakes is part of being human, but seeking redemption is essential for personal growth and healing. Moreover, the novel's depiction of war-torn Afghanistan and the plight of its people emphasizes the devastating consequences of conflict and the urgent need for compassion and understanding. This impactful and thought-provoking book is an invitation to reflect on our own past and



the potential for redemption in everyone's lives. Despite the dark themes explored in "The Kite Runner," there is a glimmer of hope for redemption and growth. The transformative power of acknowledging past mistakes, seeking forgiveness, and making amends allows characters like Amir to move beyond their guilt and strive for reconciliation. This journey towards redemption serves as a catalyst for personal growth and the potential for a better future.

Conclusion

Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner" is a poignant exploration of Afghanistan's history, presenting a mosaic of social complexities, political upheavals, and racial discrimination. Through the lens of unforgettable characters, the novel sheds light on the enduring effects of war, the consequences of betrayal, and the power of redemption. It prompts readers to empathize with the suffering of others, encouraging a deeper understanding of humanity's capacity for resilience and growth. 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".

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: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English
(A peer reviewed open access journal)

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www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.9, No.1, March, 2024

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ISSN 2455-7544

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Vol.9, No.1, March, 2024