

# THE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL STRATIFICATION THROUGH THE LENS OF KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

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## Abstract

'Pen is mightier than the sword', this phrase actually proves true when we speak about the writings of Khaled Hosseini. Due to the hard work of the author, the extreme minute details of Afghanistan have been discussed. He highlights the social stratification, cultural clashes, identity crisis, nostalgia and diasporic features. Hosseini tries to convey the actual condition of Afghan people through the portrayal of his novel, *The Kite Runner*. The country of Afghanistan seems to be on the verge of breakdown. The fight for survival continues and has transformed into a routine. In a very authentic and candid manner, Hosseini has narrated the social diversification and the division of the society. Characters in the novel act as the tools through which Hosseini breathes life into the important areas of discussion. Some of the themes that appear in the novel include: friendship, loyalty, betrayal, guilt, instability and pain. The book connects the readers emotionally across the various parts of the earth. It is a multigenerational novel that manifests complexities and contradictions. The unintentional relationship between a parent and a child has been focused upon.. While in the process of writing the novel, Hosseini developed an interest in the theme. *The Kite Runner* depicts the initial years in the history of the country, before the invasions, when Afghanistan had been one of the peaceful place.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Identity, Cultural clash, Gender gaps.

Khaled Hosseini was born in Afghanistan, whose father was a diplomat by profession, who took his family to Paris via Tehran. In the year 1979, the Communists took over Afghanistan and then the Russian Invasion followed soon after. Fortunately, Hosseini's family was granted asylum by the United States of America. The background of the writer has influenced the creativity which is quite visible in his works. Afghan population had to migrate in abundance due to several underlying reasons. Violence turns out to be the rudiment cause of displacement among the characters of the novels. The novelist transports the readers to his own native country, Afghanistan, which had been engulfed by war and terrorism. Md. Sahidul Islam asserts, "Khaled Hosseini makes an honest effort to comprehend the force of contemporary history and their effects on individual human beings who are caught up in the events. The novel reflects the complete ethos of Afghan people during Afghanistan's struggle for getting rid of the Taliban rule."

Two innocent adolescent boys namely Amir and Hassan were very close friends. Amir was the son of a wealthy businessman of Kabul, referred to as Baba in the novel. Another main character namely Hassan was the son of Amir's family servant Ali. Hassan and Ali lived in the mud- sac cottage situated in the corner of Amir's villa. Amir, a Sunni Muslim, belonged to the Pashtun group, termed as an 'ethnically superior' sect of Afghanistan. Hassan was a Shia Muslim and belonged to the minority group known as the Hazara community. This has been treated as an 'ethnically inferior' group in Afghan socio-cultural milieu. Amir and Hassan have been brought up together but Amir fails to save Hassan due to cowardice and afterwards suffers from the threatening guilt. The destiny of all the characters transformed negatively in a single day and renders them a totally different personality with innumerable struggles. Amir exclaims about Hassan:

When we were children, Hassan and I used to climb the poplar trees in the driveway of my father's house and annoy our neighbors by reflecting sunlight into their homes with a shard of mirror. We would sit across from each other on a pair of high branches, our naked feet dangling, our trouser pockets filled with dried mulberries and walnuts. We took turns with the mirror as we ate mulberries, pelted each other with them, giggling, laughing. (Hosseini 3)

Amir wins a kite flying competition and Hassan starts chasing the kite, but a boy named Assef beats and rapes Hassan brutally. Amir was the only witness of every single detail as he watched this incident through a narrow hole. His cowardice did not allow him to gather courage for helping his beloved friend. This incident torn apart the bond of Amir and Hassan. Amir planned to get rid of Hassan as he was not able to face him anymore. He secretly hid some cash and his watch under Hassan's bed and framed him guilty of theft. Finally Hassan leaves Baba's house with Ali. Amir could not forget this incident even after shifting to a different country. Hassan was extremely loyal to Amir and always said for Amir, "For you, a thousand times over". Amir could not free himself from the clutches of the guilt, even after becoming a successful person. Following Hassan's death, Amir got a chance of redemption by rescuing Hassan's only son, Sohrab from the hands of Taliban. Amir accepted this challenge courageously and saved Sohrab in order to get rid of his deepest anxiety. The opening scene of the novel describes the innocence of childhood, with a tint of human emotions such as jealousy and superiority which results in disaster. The social barriers create a very deep gulf between people belonging to different status in the society. Guilt becomes the main emotion of the story of the novel and finally Amir regains his redemption by rescuing Sohrab.

The protagonist of the novel, *The Kite Runner*, named Amir has been sketched with utmost reality. Hassan was actually not only the friend cum servant but also the half- brother of Amir. Hassan plays a very crucial role in the novel. The novel commences when Amir recollects his past incidents. An incident that had occurred years back, when he was a young boy in Afghanistan transformed him into who he has become now. Hassan was more efficient in running the kite for Amir as he was extremely expert at guessing where the kite would land. Amir's father used to love and care for both Amir and Hassan. Baba often got critical of Amir and considered him weak and lacking in courage. Amir could not resist his father's behavior towards Hassan and finds a kinder fatherly figure in Rahim Khan, Baba's closest friend. Rahim Khan understands Amir better than anyone and supports his interest in writing whereas Baba does not like his interest and termed them as being feminine like reading books. Amir had a very crooked psychology which clearly reflects in the novel. Judith Lewis Herman in her book, *Trauma and Recovery* shares her views on traumatic survivors and the way their minds react to the traumatic events. She states that "The profound disruption in basic trust, the common feelings of shame, guilt, and inferiority, and the need to avoid reminders of the trauma that might be found in social life, all foster withdrawal from closed relationships" (Herman 41).

On meeting Rahim Khan soon after his call, Amir comes to know about the devastation in his native country after the Soviets were forced out. The Taliban took over the control of Kabul by force and violence. Eventually, Rahim Khan discloses his purpose of contacting Amir and asks of a favor from him. He tells him about Hassan and mentions that when Baba and Amir had migrated from Afghanistan, Rahim Khan watched their house in Kabul. Due to his old age and loneliness, he searched for Hassan and finally convinced him to join him to Kabul. Hassan and his wife, Farzana agreed and started living with him and soon after they were blessed with a baby boy whom they named Sohrab. A few years later, Rahim Khan had to travel to Pakistan for his medical treatment. He received a call from his neighbor in Kabul telling him that the Taliban had confiscated the property of Amir's Baba and asked Hassan to vacate the house. Hassan and Farzana were shot dead on the spot as Hassan disagreed. Rahim Khan also wanted to share innumerable secrets with Amir. One of the most shocking secret was that Ali was sterile and Hassan was not Ali's son. Baba was the biological father of Hassan and Hassan his illegitimate son. Amir understood that Baba had slept with Ali's wife, Sanaubar and therefore, Hassan was his half- brother. Rahim Khan unveiled the actual reason of contacting Amir which was that he wanted Amir to rescue Sohrab, his own nephew, from an orphanage in Kabul and bring him back to Pakistan. Rahim Khan wanted Amir to save him as a reward of Hassan's unmatched loyalty towards Amir and his family. Also he wanted Amir to atone for his past misdeeds and eventually get rid of his exhausting guilt which had haunted him throughout his life. The deed of not saving Hassan from the sodomization which occurred in front of his eyes. Amir says:

I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan- the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past- and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run.

In the end, I ran. (Hosseini 72)

Amir agreed to Rahim Khan's request and accepted the challenge of saving Sohrab with utmost courage. He sets out on the extremely complicated journey which actually demanded a lot of courage, dedication and he considered this to be the key towards freeing himself from the clutches of guilt. In Afghanistan, Amir, accompanied by an Afghan taxi driver and a veteran of the war with the Soviets, starts the search for Sohrab. They were informed that a Taliban official visits the orphanage and takes away usually a girl with him. Sadly, Sohrab had been taken away a month earlier by the official. Amir also finds out the way of finding the official who was spotted at the soccer stadium next day. Amir goes to the stadium and during the half-time, he finds out

that the official had put a man and a woman in holes dug in the ground, who were later stoned to death mercilessly. Amir, sets up a meeting with the official and asks him about Sohrab, whom he was trying to search since a very long time.

Finally, Amir gets a chance to meet Sohrab, who is dressed up in a blue silk outfit. His eyelashes are damped in mascara, making him appear more feminine and his attire suggested that he was being abused sexually and molested badly by the men of the Taliban officials. Soon, Amir realizes that the official was none other than his childhood enemy Assef, the boy who had raped Hassan years back. Sohrab was being trapped at the same person's house who had molested Sohrab's father as well. Assef also recognizes Amir and challenges him that if he becomes successful in beating him in a fight, then he would definitely release Sohrab. He wanted to settle some unfinished business that had been due. Amir agrees and Assef uses all his might to beat Amir in this fight by using his brass knuckles. Amir's ribs get broken and his lip also gets split up which became familiar to the one Hassan was born with. Sohrab, saves Amir and threatens Assef with his slingshot, which resulted in Sohrab shooting him in the eye. This episode helped Amir and Sohrab to escape from this perilous situation. After Amir's recovery in the hospital, he came to know that exists no couple who could look after Sohrab. Rahim Khan had actually referred to Amir and Soraya for Sohrab's care and upbringing. Actually Amir was the one who was now responsible for Sohrab's future. Amir discloses his plans to Sohrab which were to take him back to America and possibly adopt him. Certain hardships also occurred during the course of Sohrab's adoption but Amir did not give up and finally managed to be accompanied by Sohrab to the United States.

Amir and Soraya eventually adopt Sohrab, but he denied to interact with the couple and remained quiet and withdrawn from everyone. The painful past incidents he had to go through forcefully and violently as a child, moulded his personality negatively. One fine day, Amir escorts Sohrab to a park where other Afghan people were found flying kites. Amir buys one kite for Sohrab and encourages him to fly it. Amir supports and cheers for him and they spot another kite and Amir battles it. He also introduced Sohrab to some of the most famous tricks that Hassan used while kite fighting. After using Hassan's favorite trick, they were able to win this kite fighting competition. Sohrab's face gets lit up with a smile after several months. The lost kite is found soaring loose in the sky and Amir rushes behind it, trying to run the kite for Sohrab. Amir acted in the same way as Hassan used to do for him. Sohrab's smile touches the deepest corners of his heart and he embraces it so much. Finally, at the end of the novel, Amir runs for the kite and exclaims to Sohrab, "For you, a thousand times over" (Hosseini 340). Amir's actions signified his loyalty, dedication and eternal love for Sohrab.

Khaled Hosseini can be rightly called the master of the art of designing the psychological makeup through the portrayal of each and every character. The characters symbolize a number of emotions and expressions that can be found in almost every other human being living in various parts of the earth. Hosseini has, undoubtedly, woven all the tales in a very heart throbbing and gripping manner. The story of *The Kite Runner* is a complex web of relationships woven by the author in order to experience catharsis from the readers.

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