

Impact of Afghan Conflicts as Reflected in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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ABSTRACT

The Kite Runner is a novel by Khaled Hosseini and one of the literary works that presents the social life of Afghan people in each political era of Afghanistan. The aim of this paper is to discuss the impact of the Afghan conflict since the end of 1970's until the 2000's, the author describes the impact of the conflict of Afghanistan since the time of Daoud Khan's coup, the Soviet Invasion, the Civil War Afghanistan, and the

Taliban regime. This study used a mimetic approach that compares the actual occurrence with what is found in the novel. In analyzing this novel, the author uses sociological theory of literature by Alan Swingewood, first perspective regard literature as historical documentation and the time of the literary works made. Then the author uses qualitative methods, where the research described in a descriptive form of words or experts from novel and other sources related to the Afghan conflict. This paper focuses on the condition of Afghan society's life during the Afghan conflicts and the impact of Afghan conflicts as reflected in the novel, *The Kite Runner*.

Keywords: Sociology, Afghanistan, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. In March 2001, while practicing medicine, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, Published by Riverhead Books in 2003, that debut went on to become an international bestseller and beloved classic, sold in at least seventy countries and spending more than a hundred weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In May 2007, his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, remaining in that spot for fifteen weeks and nearly an entire year on the bestseller list. Together, the two books have sold more than 10 million copies in the United States and more than 38 million copies worldwide. *The Kite Runner* was adapted into a graphic novel of the same name in 2011. Hosseini's much-awaited third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, was published on May 21, 2013.

HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN IN BRIEF

In 1973, King Zahir Shah was overthrown in a coup by his cousin and former Prime Minister, Muhammad Daud. Daud declared Afghanistan a republic, with himself as president, and the King went into exile in Italy. Daud's government, however, was opposed by both the leftist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and

traditional ethnic leaders. In April 1978, leftist military officers overthrew and killed Daud and PDPA leader Noor Muhammad Taraki became President.

Late in 1978, Islamic traditionalists and ethnic leaders began an armed revolt, and by the summer of 1979 they controlled much of Afghanistan's rural areas. In September, Taraki was deposed and later killed. He was replaced by his deputy, Hafizullah Amin, but Amin also failed to suppress the rebellion, and the government's position weakened. On 25 December 1979, Soviet forces entered Afghanistan, and took control of Kabul. Babrak Karmal, leader of a less hard-line faction of the PDPA, became President. Karmal adopted more open policies towards religion and ethnicity. However, the rebellion intensified.

The 1980s

The USSR began withdrawing its forces. With the Security Council's agreement on 25 April 1988

The 1990s

In 1991, responsibility for Operation Salam - the UN's emergency relief programme for Afghanistan - was taken over by the Secretary-General's Personal Representative at the time, Benon Sevan.

From this study, the author came to the conclusion that the impact of the conflict of Afghanistan war were:

- People of Afghanistan lost family members, either they were separate as well as killed in the conflict.
- They were forced to live in poverty due to their wealth and their homes had been destroyed during the ongoing conflict.
- Trauma due to depression during the conflict.
- Occurrence of cultural alteration after or during conflict.
- Evacuation to neighboring countries in an effort to find a safer place.

The Taliban takes Kabul

Meanwhile, the Taliban rebellion was growing in strength. In late 1994 and early 1995, the rebels took control of much of southern and western Afghanistan, including Kandahar and Herat. In a presidential statement on 15 February 1996, the Security Council expressed concern about intensified hostilities around the capital city of Kabul, which prevented deliveries of humanitarian aid. It was also deeply concerned that the continuing conflict provided fertile ground for terrorism, arms transfers and drug trafficking, which destabilized the whole region and beyond.

Post 11 September

In the escalation of the conflict in Afghanistan following the 11 September terrorist attack on the United States by the Afghan-based Al Qaeda group, the Security Council expressed support for the efforts of the Afghan people to replace the Taliban regime, once again condemned for allowing Afghanistan to be used as a base for the export of terrorism and for providing safe haven to Usama bin Laden.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan visited Kabul on 25 January to offer moral support to the new Interim Administration and to thank members of the United Nations staff in Afghanistan for their sustained effort to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.

The Kite Runner

The Kite Runner is the first novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini. Published in 2003 by Riverhead Books, it tells the story of Amir, a young boy from the Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul, whose closest friend is Hassan, his father's young Hazara servant. The story is set against a backdrop of tumultuous events, from the fall of Afghanistan's monarchy through the Soviet military intervention, the exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the rise of the Taliban regime.

Hosseini has commented that he considers *The Kite Runner* to be a father–son story, emphasizing the familial aspects of the narrative, an element that he continued to use in his later works. Themes of guilt and redemption feature prominently in the novel, with a pivotal scene depicting an act of violence against Hassan that Amir fails to prevent. The latter half of the book centers on Amir's attempts to atone for this transgression by rescuing Hassan's son over two decades later.

As with Hosseini's subsequent novels, *The Kite Runner* covers a multigenerational period and focuses on the relationship between parents and their children. The latter was unintentional; Hosseini developed an interest in the theme while in the process of writing. He later divulged that he frequently came up with pieces of the plot by drawing pictures of it. For example, he did not decide to make Amir and Hassan brothers until after he had "doodled it".

Like Amir, the protagonist of the novel, Hosseini was born in Afghanistan and left the country as a youth, not returning until 2003. Thus, he was frequently questioned about the extent of the autobiographical aspects of the book. In response, he said, "When I say some of it is me, then people look unsatisfied. The parallels are pretty obvious, but ... I left a few things ambiguous because I wanted to drive the book clubs crazy." Having left the country around the time of the Soviet invasion, he felt a certain amount of survivor's guilt: "Whenever I read stories about Afghanistan my reaction was always tinged with guilt. A lot of my childhood friends had a very hard time. Some of our cousins died. One died in a fuel truck trying to escape Afghanistan [an incident that Hosseini fictionalises in *The Kite Runner*]. Talk about guilt. He was one of the kids I grew up with flying kites. His father was shot." Regardless, he maintains that the plot is fictional. Later, when writing his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (then titled *Dreaming in Titanic City*), Hosseini remarked that he was happy that the main characters were women as it "should put the end to the autobiographical question once and for all".

Originally published in English, *The Kite Runner* was later translated into 42 languages for publication in 38 countries. In 2013, Riverhead released the 10th anniversary edition with a new gold-rimmed cover and a foreword by Hosseini. That same year, on May 21, Khaled Hosseini published another book called *And the Mountains Echoed*.

CRITICS VIEW ON THE KITE RUNNER

Amelia Hill's View on The Kite Runner

In *The Observer* on Sunday 7 September 2003, Amelia Hill in her article *An Afghan hounded by his past* says:

In this, apparently the first Afghan novel to be written in English, two motherless boys who learn to crawl and walk side by side, are destined to destroy each other across the gulf of their tribal difference in a country of dried mulberries, sour oranges, rich pomegranates and honey.

It's a Shakespearean beginning to an epic tale that spans lives lived across two continents amid political upheavals, where dreams wilt before they bud and where a search for a child finally makes a coward into a man. *The Kite Runner* is the shattering first novel by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan doctor who received political asylum in 1980 as civil conflict devastated his homeland.

Whatever the truth of the claim to be the first English-language Afghan novel, Hosseini is certainly the first Afghan novelist to fictionalise his culture for a Western readership, melding the personal struggle of ordinary people into the terrible historical sweep of a devastated country in a rich and soul-searching narrative.

The book charts Amir's attempts to flee culpability for this act of betrayal, seeking asylum from his hellish homeland in California and a new life buried deep in black velvet portraits of Elvis. Amir's story is simultaneously devastating and inspiring. His world is a patchwork of the beautiful and horrific, and the book a sharp, unforgettable taste of the trauma and tumult experienced by Afghans as their country buckled.

Sarah A Smith's View on the *Kite Runner*

In *The Guardian* on Saturday 4 October 2003, Sarah A Smith in her article *From Harelip To Split lip* says:

War and the trauma of the Taliban have made Afghanistan an unlikely setting for literary fiction, and have given its writers little opportunity to be heard in the west. California-based Khaled Hosseini's first novel is an attempt to correct this, and to remind us of the anonymity it enjoyed before the Soviet invasion in 1979.

The nucleus of *The Kite Runner* is strong. Amir, the motherless only child of the widely loved Baba, has grown up with Hassan, a member of the abused Hazara minority who is both his servant and his best friend. In a moment of cowardice, however, Amir betrays his companion, leaving him in the hands of a violent bully who rapes him. After this, the very sight of Hassan becomes painful to Amir, and he betrays him once again, forcing the boy and his crippled father from the family home.

A Woman's Lot in Kabul, Lower than a House Cat's-Michiko Kakutani

Michiko Kakutani in her article, *A woman's Lot in Kabul, Lower Than a House Cat's*, May 29 2007 in *New York Times* Says:

It's not that hard to understand why Khaled Hosseini's first novel, "*The Kite Runner*" (2003), became such a huge best seller, based largely on word of mouth and its popularity among book clubs and reading groups. The novel read like a kind of modern-day variation on Conrad's "*Lord Jim*," in which the hero spends his life atoning for an act of cowardice and betrayal committed in his youth. It not only gave readers an intimate look at Afghanistan and the difficulties of life there, but it also showed off its author's accessible and very old-fashioned storytelling talents: his taste for melodramatic plotlines; sharply drawn, black-and-white characters; and elemental boldfaced emotions.

Whereas "*The Kite Runner*" focused on fathers and sons, and friendships between men, his latest novel, "*A Thousand Splendid Suns*," focuses on mothers and daughters, and friendships between women. Whereas "*Kite Runner*" got off to a gripping start and stumbled into contrivance and sentimentality in its second half, "*Splendid Suns*" starts off programmatically and gains speed and emotional power as it slowly unfurls.

In the opening chapters of the book the characters are so one-dimensional that they feel like cartoons. Laila is the great beauty, with a doting father and a protective boyfriend — a lucky girl whose luck abruptly runs out. Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of a bitter woman and a disloyal father — an unlucky girl whose luck turns from bad to worse. And Rasheed is the evil bully, a misogynist intent on debasing his two wives.

Gradually, however, Mr. Hosseini's instinctive storytelling skills take over, mowing down the reader's objections through sheer momentum and will. He succeeds in making the emotional reality of Mariam and Laila's lives tangible to us, and by conjuring their day-to-day routines, he is able to give us a sense of what daily life was like in Kabul — both before and during the harsh reign of the Taliban.

Behind the veil-Natasha Waltar

Natasha Waltar in her article, *Behind the Veil*, Saturday 19 May 2007 in *The Guardian* says:

Anyone whose heart strings were pulled by Khaled Hosseini's first, hugely successful novel, *The Kite Runner*, should be more than satisfied with this follow-up. Hosseini is skilled at telling a certain kind of story, in which events that may seem unbearable - violence, misery and abuse - are made readable. He doesn't gloss over the horrors his characters live through, but something about his direct, explanatory style and the sense that you are moving towards a redemptive ending makes the whole narrative, for all its tragedies, slip down rather easily.

Where Hosseini's novel begins to sing is in depicting the slowly growing friendship of the two wives in the face of the horrific abuse from their shared husband. Laila looks at Mariam, and "For the first time, it was not an adversary's face Laila saw but a face of grievances unspoken, burdens gone unprotested, and a destiny submitted to and endured. If she stayed, would this be her own face, Laila wondered?" The women's only hope of affection or solidarity is with one another, and they survive not just physically but also emotionally by putting their faith in each other and in their love for Laila's children. Hosseini does not challenge the usual western view of Afghanistan, but he does enrich it - he adds greater knowledge and understanding to it, and makes the Afghans come alive as loving, feeling individuals.

***The Kite Runner*: Children, Violence, and the Ethnic Imaginary in Afghanistan**

On September 16, 2007, Marc Forster's film *The Kite Runner*, based on Khaled Hosseini's 2003 novel by the same name, goes for its official debut in the White House. It is screened for President George W. Bush, his defense team, and few other invited guests. Given the War on Terror still raging in Afghanistan at the time, it is not difficult to guess this small audience expected the film to serve the strategic and propaganda interests. Among the invited guests also sat Hosseini. His participation in the screening event, and a photo-op with the President and the First Lady, apparently gave the impression as to the centrality of the strategic dimension of his novel Hosseini's participation in the perverse screening event caused some disadvantage of its creative and critical dimensions.

Children and Negotiations in the Violence of the Ethnic Imaginary

In order to understand the enabling dynamic of the novel, we need to focus on the artistic use of language and imagery—the critique in style or critical style. More often than not the critical style has something different to offer from what is apparently offered in the plot, narrative or representation. By focusing on the style of the novel, I want to demonstrate that certain critical lessons regarding the ethnic imaginary mixed with sectarianism in Afghanistan can be drawn.

Scene I

Problematizing the Ethnic Imaginary

The novel begins with a disturbing ethnic and sectarian sketch. Amir Jan, the child protagonist, introduces himself, his family, and the society around him by way of juxtaposition. He juxtaposes himself and his family against his servant-friend and his family. A sharp contrast immediately works to help him imagine his entitlement and privilege in the society. He contrasts his Caucasian physiognomy with Hassan's Mangoloid one. Hassan is described to have a round face like a Chinese doll, a flat and broad nose, slanting eyes, low-set ears and a pointed stub of a chin. Then he contrasts his large house with Hassan's mud shack rather than with any other houses in the district. After that he compares his parents with Hassan's parents. Hassan's mother is described as "beautiful but notoriously unscrupulous woman who lived up to her dishonorable reputation." She mocks her husband and refuses to accept her child. Moreover, few days after giving birth she elopes, "a fate most Afghans considered far worse than death."

Amir's juxtaposition of his and Hassan's parents unravels the superiority/inferiority and morality/immorality claims based on ethnicity. While he describes Hassan's mother to have eloped, later in the novel he introduces another episode of eloping. This episode relates to a young Pashtun lady, Soraya.

Scene II

The Telos versus the Everyday

The ethnic imaginary is pervasive and deep-rooted. Amir introduces its pervasiveness and depth as he thinks about the social roles, and how many people in Afghanistan would take them for given—predetermined and fixed. At one point, thinking of Hassan, Ali and the Hazaras in general Amir wonders:

...Hassan would grow up illiterate like Ali and most Hazaras had been decided the minute he had been born...after all, what use did a servant have for the written word?

Scene III

The Ethnic Imaginary and the Afghan State Project

Amir's above remark "In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara" does not invoke a simple ethnographic classification. Rather it is loaded with a racial overtone. Hence it comes across more as a labeling than classification, political than scientific—characterizing one group with all the features that are thought appropriate of an (imagined) Afghan and the other with those that are thought not appropriate. Interestingly, however, just as Amir invokes this labeling he does not let it go and be taken for granted. He precedes his remark with something challenging: "...history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion." Now should we become sensitive to the structure of the sentences and invert the negative tense, the logic will sound like this: Because we overcame history and religion, I was not a Pashtun and he was not a Hazara. *Prima facie*, this inversion might sound like a tautological linguistic twist. But on a closer look, we see how it helps raise one of the most urgent political questions facing Afghanistan: Is it possible to overcome history and religion?

Scene IV

Afghanistan: A Plurality

It goes without much argument that Afghanistan has been a land of diversity. Even today different parts of the country are host to different cultures, languages and ethnic communities.

Scene V

There is a Way to be Good Again: Redeeming Plurality of Identity

To make sense of his world Amir begins with simple juxtapositions. At times his juxtapositions become complex. However, juxtaposing remains his simple but erudite methodology. He deploys juxtapositions to help him see and/or create an order in his world. And he feels that he is called upon to register his intervention for restoring some semblance of moral order in his world: "There is a way to be good again."

CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the impacts of Afghanistan conflicts as reflected on

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini, we conclude that the novel describes the impacts of Afghanistan conflicts relation to the real fact of Afghanistan life and how it changed the life of Afghanistan people. Besides the novel fulfills the sociological literature approach which is considered as imitation of life condition of Afghanistan people in Afghanistan War.

The conflicts bring many impacts for Afghan people. Here, we find five impacts of Afghan conflicts. Concerning on the analysis of this paper, we can finally conclude several impacts of Afghan conflicts that change life of Afghan people.

First, losing their family. It is known that Afghan conflicts have resulted many victims and actually it have made the Afghan people lose their members of family.

Second, living in poverty. During Afghanistan conflicts many of Afghanistan people live in the condition of being limited for the basic necessities of life like food, clothes and also shelter.

Third, getting trauma. It was the abnormal condition that happened in Afghanistan during Afghan conflicts. While before Afghan conflicts they live in peaceful situation, but after Afghan conflicts they have to face bad, difficult and cruel condition. They have to get life in abnormal situation that has made many of Afghan people get trauma.

Fourth, cultural alteration. Conflicts on Afghanistan change or made different the old culture and then emerge the new or different culture between before, during and after conflicts happen.

And the **fifth**, Escape. War is undoubtedly brought torture for the people in colonized country. In order to avoid any suffering that is caused by war, many Afghanistan people then try to escape from their country.

After analyzing this novel, we conclude that *The Kite Runner* gives the imitation of social life condition of Afghanistan people during Afghan conflicts. This novel reflects the phenomena of the impacts of the Afghan conflicts for the author combines his imagination and the real fact in the society.

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