

Bigotry in Khaled Hosseini the Kite Runner

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Abstract

In every nation there are some ethnic groups with the same origin and similar customs that may or may not be judged equally by the power-holding ethnic groups. Afghanistan is one such country with severe ethnic ideologies. This study focuses on the cultural, social and scientific investigations accomplished on the people's races and ethnical characteristics. Racism is the human differences that happened between 16th and 19th century when people began differentiating among themselves, but is not the result of scientific observation. Apart from the distinction of racism, the theme of guilt plays as a building block in *The Kite Runner*. This paper also argues the misbehavior and ultimate salvation is essentially the goal of the author and that he aims to achieve through the protagonist, Amir. The story has three sides: the relationship between a sibling and his betterment, rigid bond between an uncle and his furtherance nephew and the social character of various ethnic groups in the numerous parts of Afghanistan. Though there are apparent motifs such as prejudice, expert and humanity, this paper will remain focused on racism, unfaithfulness, answerability and salvation.

KEYWORDS: power-handler, salvation, furtherance, motifs, answerability.

INTRODUCTION:

The Kite Runner written by Khaled Hosseini in 2003 and this is regarded as his masterpiece. It is a work full of symbols and metaphors. His other works are *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and also *And the Mountains Echoes* (2013). In his foreword to the 10th anniversary edition of the novel, Hosseini writes,

In these letters [he received from sympathizers and fans all over the world], I see the unique ability fiction has to connect people, and see how universal some human experiences are: shame, guilt, regret, friendship, love forgiveness, atonement. (*The Kite Runner*, xi)

Racism is a bitter reality that has existed in all ages and in all societies. One subcategory of racism is ethnicity which most often is considered as an alternative term of racism. To be obvious, ethnicity may or may not be in a race. Actually, ethnicity refers to a group of people who are of the same 'origin, history, values, attitudes, and behavior', but they may differ in terms of clothing, customs or religion. Ethnicity is in fact the cultural differences that exist among people of a nation. Thus, ethnicity could be called cultural identity. Here, it is culture that plays a role in division of people into different groups since people's clothes, rituals, and even morals are structured by it. These cultural objects are materials like costumes and cloths or non-materials like language and customs. In the first page of the novel Hosseini writes in a flashback technique "one day

last summer, my friend Rahim Khan called me from Pakistan. He asked me to see him... I knew it wasn't just Rahim Khan on the line. It was my past of unatoned sins" (1).

Although this novel has any themes within itself like war, friendship, migration, poverty, and so on. The theme of racism in an argument concerning the clash and conflict between the Pashtun and the Hazara, the two ethnical Afghan groups, through the lenses of the American sociologist 'Joe R. Feagin' by whom the idea of inferiority of some people to others is denied. Thus, the aim of this paper is to take out the main reasons for racial and ethnic behavior of Afghan figures in *The Kite Runner* and bring the social, scientific, and political justifications of racist people in the novel to prove that as Feagin points out all these are just some excuses that the authoritative groups in a nation or generally in the world use to gain their plans which is their domination over other people and their mere use of natural properties due to their absence of mineral and agricultural resources. Besides, Amir's reaction as a protagonist of the novel in the later chapters of the novel in bringing back Hassan's son to America and his sympathy with him can be representative of Hosseini's concern for the existence of ethnic and racist views in his country.

DISCUSSION:

In the novel *The Kite Runner*, there are many similarities between the life of Hassan and that of Hosseini himself. In an interview with Hermione Hoby, Hossein stated,

My dad was a diplomat and my mum was vice-principle of a high school and now (in America) she's a waitress at Denny's working the graveyard shift, and my dad is a driving instructor" (Khaled Hosseini: 'If I could go back now, IV).

Agony and distress is central to this topic and the torment that Amir undergoes causes him untold anguish. After seeing Hassan being raped by Assef, Amir was tormented because he did not help or even tried to help him, 'I watched Hassan get raped', Amir recalls. This resulted in him being an 'insomniac'. Often after an episode like this, victims may experience Post-traumatic stress disorder, feelings of severe anxiety and stress, depression, flashback memories of rape as if it is taking place again, borderline personality disorder, sleep disorders or eating disorders. After being raped by Assef, Hassan stopped seeing or playing with Amir as often as he did in the past. Instead, he tended to sleep more and more; he found refuge in sleeping more hours, as Ali (Hassan's father) told Amir. Ali was anxious about the well-being of his son and hence wanted to get answers for his questions from Amir. Ali was anxious about the well-being of his son and hence wanted to get answers for his questions from Amir. On his turn, Hassan no longer did his home chores next to Amir when he was having his meals. Rather, he avoided being close to Amir. For about two weeks they did not even speak to each other. After a few months later, Amir inclined to avoid being with Hassan as well, since this kept reminding him of the crime committed against Hassan and how helpless he was being unable to defend him.

I'd hear Hassan shuffling around the kitchen in the morning; hear the clinking of silverware, the whistle of the teapot. I'd wait to hear the door shut and only then I would walk down to eat. (*The Kite Runner*, 87)

Another scene that portrays Amir's acceptance of his dominance and authority over Hassan and other Hazaras is when Assef and his friends, who are all Pushtuns, through the ignorance of Amir find this opportunity to rape Hassan. In addition, at the hospital in a dream Amir is reminded by Assef that they both two pashtuns and from wealthy families and both committed the same act; Hassan was raped by Assef and with the Amir's silence he was supported. Thus this fact is disclosed that although Amir was aware of the violent act of Assef, he was just a viewer and did not make any attempt to help Hassan.

Assef is also a character that strongly desires the elimination of the Hazara from Afghanistan. He is a German-Afghan guy that is exactly what John Arthur says about racist people. Assef with blue eyes and blonde hair holds 'attitudes [that] include unjustified hostility toward a racial group'. He strongly dislikes Hazaras is derived from the past when some Germans were sent to Afghanistan by Hitler and especially to Nuristan where its people had blue eyes and blond hair. Since these Germans due to their facial appearance did not approve to be from Aryan origin, the matter that was important for Hitler. In *The Kite Runner*, Assef is determined to remove all the Hazaras from the region of Afghanistan and actually it is a mission for him since Afghanistan was the ground of the Pashtun people and Pushtuns were the real Afghans and the true heirs of it. Assef also blames Amir and his father because they are Hazaras. In adulthood, Assef joins Taliban, who were mostly Pashtuns, in order to fulfill his mission. He tells Amir that 'Afghanistan is like a beautiful big house that was filled with garbage Hazaras' and it is his duty to remove the garbage. All these lead him to kill many Hazaras in Hazarajat, the hometown of Hazara ethnic group, in a massacre that was arranged against Hazaras. For Assef this massacre is an honor and Amir to him is a traitor who escaped from his country and left it for Hazaras.

In the small country of Afghanistan where its population till 2009 was approximately 28 million people, there are many ethnic groups like Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Baluchi, and Turkoman. Accordingly, Afghanistan is defined as "a country comprised of various groups with different cultural traits, including language, religious practices, physical appearance and attire, and customs..." [13]. The plot and events of the novel *The Kite Runner*, written by Khaled Hosseini, is set in Afghanistan and America and is around the two groups of Pashtuns and Hazara that are respectively the majority and minority ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Besides, the term "majority" refers to the extensive number of Pushtuns in Afghanistan, it also implies their power, influence, and wealth in this society. In contrast, the term "minority" discloses the low number of Hazaras, it also reveals lack of the economic, political, and generally full participation in community. It is said by Amir in the novel that Hazaras were deeply oppressed by Pashtuns. They were killed by pashtuns and forced to get out of their lands and homes and were considered as Pashtuns' slaves. "The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women." (14)

In the past, Afghanistan was a region of the Persian Empire. When in the 18th century the king of Persia announced that all people must convert to Islam, Pashtuns who lived in the south of Afghanistan, opposed this edict and eventually attacked Kabul and soon with the leading of Durrani they gained the control of Afghanistan. Hazaras were a small group in

the central territory of Afghan state that were thought to be from the Mongolian race and as Amir says: “they were Mongol and they looked little like Chinese people.” (16). The Hazaras arrived in Afghanistan in the 13th and 14th century and when they rebelled against the oppression of the Pashtuns in the 19th century, they were repressed by the Pashtuns and thus excluded from many social rights including the right for receiving education. School textbooks barely mentioned them and referred to their ancestry only in passing. Then one day, I was in Baba’s study, looking through his stuff, when I found one of my mother’s old history books... and was stunned to find an entire chapter on Hazara history. An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan’s people! In it read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had quelled them with unspeakable violence. Another big reason was that the populated Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims and the minority Hazaras were Shi’a Muslims. This subject alone made Hazaras more secluded in society and for this reason they sometimes were offended by Sunni Muslims of Afghanistan.

The following week, after class, I showed the book to my teacher and pointed to the chapter on the Hazaras. He skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, handed the book back. “That’s the one thing Shi’a people do well,” he said, picking up his papers, “passing themselves as martyrs.” He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shi’a, like it was some kind of disease. [14]. Moreover, the US Department of State country report on Afghanistan for 2012, in a part titled “National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities”, illustrates: “Ethnic tensions between various groups continued to result in conflict and killings. For example, in November riots occurred at Kabul University after Sunni students tried to prevent ethnic Hazara students from observing Shiite religious practices...”

Additionally, Hazaras were mocked and insulted by Pashtuns for the form of their eyes and generally face the subject that severally was repeated in the novel by the author, especially in the first part of the novel. One instance for such behavior is when Amir says: “It also said some things I did know, like that people call Hazaras, mice-eating, flat-nosed, load carrying donkeys. I had heard some of the kids in the neighborhood yell those names to Hassan” (14). In spite of all the points that were mentioned about the harsh presence of ethnicity and conflicts of some ethnic groups like Pushtun and Hazara and violent acts of some persons like Assef toward Hazara, there are several signs in the novel *The Kite Runner* that reveal the fact that these quarrels can be resolved in the Afghan society and Afghanistan can be changed to a united country. One big example of it is the friendship of Amir and Hassan, one from Pushtun and the other from Hazara ethnic group and their reciprocal sacrifices; Hassan in his childhood helps Amir over and over at the expense of being raped by Assef and his friends and Amir in his adulthood proves his sacrifice spirit when he goes back to Afghanistan and rescues Sohrab, Hassan’s son, at the cost of having a mortal and fatal quarrel with Assef and going to the death edge. Thus, it cannot be judged that the conflicts struggles between ethnic groups in Afghanistan are the outcomes of racism and ethnicity, though they have roles in this course, they are not the main reasons.

CONCLUSION:

In *The Kite Runner*, the novel written by Khaled Hosseini, the subject of racism and ethnicity is thoroughly conspicuous and perceptible in the early parts of the book when Amir and Baba are in Afghanistan and in the chapters that are related to the dominance of Taliban in Afghanistan. The unfair behavior of Pashtuns including Baba and Amir is detailed by Amir himself throughout the novel and the severe and terrible actions of Taliban toward Hazaras who are immediately killed whenever they encounter with a Taliban member is explained by him. As it was mentioned before, the idea of human difference was not accepted by Feagin who believed that facial or biological differences do not indicate that some people are superior to other people and thereby they should not impose their power over other people. Accordingly, in the novel *The Kite Runner*, Pashtuns are noteworthy in this case by whom the Hazara's appearance is mocked and they are mostly poisoned as slaves of Pashtuns who are not respected by the community of Afghanistan. Racism has negative outcomes with itself and its most important destroying product is exclusion from social participation and at last exclusion from all human rights that includes the other negative effects of racist outlook like oppression, discrimination, and as a result imbalance in society. According to the definition of racism and ethnicity, it could be concluded that racism is more a social construct than a biological difference which roots in acts of some groups of people that use their facial preference to obtain their goals.

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