

HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF KHALEED HOSSEINI'S "THE KITE RUNNER"

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Abstract: *The Kite Runner* maps the journey of the Amir, the narrator. The story takes place in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States from 1975 to 2003. *The Kite Runner* leaves one feeling, a terrible Sadness for the Afghan people. Afghans have suffered at the hands of foreign invaders and their own people throughout the history of Afghanistan and particularly in the past 30 years. In *The Kite Runner*, Khalid Hosseini brilliantly tells their story within a story. The Cold War between the U.S.A. and the former Soviet Union, and the rule of Taliban brought death and utter destruction to the country. *The Kite Runner* is also a story about the collapse of civil society and the violation of fundamental human rights that commonly takes place in such settings - ethnic and racial discrimination, religious intolerance, the oppression of women and children, war crimes, the plight of refugees.

Key Words: Cultural Contexts of "The Kite Runner."

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Kite Runner is set in Afghanistan and America. The novel is directly links with the Afghan history, geography, ethnic groups, the Soviet invasion, the rise of the Taliban, 9/11 and the US invasion. After September 11th, as it became apparent that the United States would bomb Afghanistan, an open letter written by an Afghan appeared on the Internet. It pleaded with Americans to realize that Afghanistan was already a devastated country.

The Kite Runner spans the period from before the 1979 Soviet invasion until the reconstruction following the fall of the Taliban. The novel portrays the Afghans as an independent and proud people who for decades have defended their country against one invader after another. But the narrator wonders if his people will ever transcend the tribalism that continues to threaten Afghanistan's integrity. "Maybe," he thinks, "it was a hopeless place."

The novel's canvas turns dark when Hosseini describes the suffering of his country under the tyranny of the Taliban, whom Amir encounters when he finally returns home, hoping to help Hassan and his family. The final third of the book is full of haunting images: a man, desperate to feed his children, trying to sell his artificial leg in the market; an adulterous couple stoned to death in a stadium during the halftime of a football match; a rouged young boy forced into prostitution, dancing the sort of steps once performed by an organ grinder's monkey.

But political events, even as dramatic as the ones that are presented in "The Kite Runner," are only a part of this story. A more personal plot, arising from Amir's close friendship with Hassan, the son of his father's servant, turns out to be the thread that ties the book together. The fragility of this relationship, symbolized by the kites the boys fly together, is tested as they watch their old way of life disappear.

The Kite Runner is also a story about the collapse of civil society and the violation of fundamental human rights that commonly takes place in such settings - ethnic and racial discrimination, religious intolerance, the oppression of women and children, war crimes, the plight of refugees. Afghan refugees escaping war and Taliban rule are victims of human rights violation in this novel also, among them Baba and Amir living in exile in Hayward, California—for Amir, "a place to bury [his] memories"; for Baba, "a place to mourn his"; (p. 112). In Hayward, however, there are "homes that made Baba's house in Wazir Akbar Khan look like a servant's hut"

In 1981, at a checkpoint on their way out of Afghanistan after two years of Soviet occupation, Baba and Amir encountered a Russian soldier who, though already paid bribe money, demanded a further condition of their escape: "a half hour with the lady in the back of the truck" (p. 100).

Baba said to the truck driver: "Ask him where his shame is." To which the Russian soldier responded: "There is no shame in war." Angrily, Baba countered: "Tell him he's wrong. War doesn't negate decency. It demands it, even more than in times of peace" (ibid.). As it happens, Baba speaks consistently with international law which, in both treaty and custom, insists upon humane rules of armed conflict in international and civil wars. A disdain for the Russians resulting from their invasion and occupation of Afghanistan beginning in 1979 is palpable throughout this book. United States helped to arm and train the *mujahideen* who later made Taliban governance possible.

Khalid Hosseini 'wanted to write about Afghanistan before the Soviet war because that is largely a forgotten period in modern Afghan history. For many people in the west, Afghanistan is synonymous with the Soviet war and the Taliban.' He explains: 'I wanted to remind people that Afghans had managed to live in peaceful anonymity for decades, that the history of the Afghans in the twentieth century has been largely peaceful and harmonious'.

As a result of Afghanistan's many years of civil strife and inhumane governance, children were prominently victimized. As Zaman, director of the orphanage visited by Amir in search of Sohrab, puts it (p. 222): "Many of [the children] have lost their fathers in the war, and their mothers can't feed them because the Taliban don't allow them to work . . . There is very little shelter here, almost no food, no clothes, no clean water. What I have in ample supply here is children who've lost their childhood." A similar sentiment is later expressed by Sohrab when he says (p. 277): "There are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood."

Afghanistan continues to this day to be a land of conflict, divided by religion, caste, class, political ambition, global power politics, and other factors in such a way as to make the realization of human rights for the Afghan people as a whole still a distant dream. It is not alone in this regard. Major and widespread human rights abuse has been all too familiar in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Rwanda, Congo, East Timor, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, among others, in recent years.

2. Cultural Contexts of "The Kite Runner" :

The novel portrays the Afghans as an independent and proud people who for decades have defended their country against one invader after another. But the narrator wonders if his people will ever transcend the tribalism that continues to threaten Afghanistan's integrity. "Maybe," he thinks, "it was a hopeless place." As a boy, Amir, the protagonist, cravenly betrays his servant and best friend, the Hazara boy Hassan. When the Russians come, Amir and his father move to California, where Amir becomes a successful writer. He embraces America because it "had no ghosts, no memories, and no sins." But when Amir learns that a childhood mentor is ailing back home, he returns to discover that his relationship to Hassan had been deeper than he realized. This leads him on a hazardous journey to rescue and adopt Hassan's son, whose father the Taliban had executed.

The novel derives its name from the Afghan custom of doing battle with kites. Although the book can sometimes be melodramatic and garrulous, it provides an extraordinary perspective on the struggles of a country that, until that doleful September day in 2001, had been for too long ignored or misunderstood. And despite its grimmer episodes, the novel ends with a note of optimism about Afghanistan's future, an optimism that the whole world would prefer to see unspoiled. *Inshallah*, as Afghans say: God willing. In "The Kite Runner," Khaled Hosseini gives a vivid and engaging story that reminds us how long his people have been struggling to triumph over the forces of violence - forces that continue to threaten them even today.

Hosseini's depiction of pre-revolutionary Afghanistan is rich in warmth and humor but also tense with the friction between the nation's different ethnic groups. Amir is from among Afghanistan's privileged - the Pashtuns, who are Sunni Muslims. Hassan is of a shunned ethnic minority - the Mongoloid Hazaras, who are Shi'ite Muslims. It could be said that what makes Hassan so endearing to Amir is that Hassan never complains about his "station in life" and that he cheerfully and unconditionally accepts his second-class status. By the end of the story, when his true relation to Amir is revealed, Hassan is rewarded by being posthumously elevated to a status of near-parity with Amir and his family; and in the U.S. Amir finally stands up for Sohrab, Hassan's son, as an individual and not merely an ethnic face.

But there is no instance of anyone of the "lower" cast ever rebelling against this taken-for-granted domination. If they did, it is likely that they would not be as friendly and pleasant as Hassan and his father, Ali. Religion seems to be many things to many people in this novel. Baba is celebrated in part for his exceptionally secular ways in a traditional society; it is nearly the civic framework for his California exile community in Hayward. Amir exercises it in an entirely private way, as if his faith were more repentance than conversion. And in Assef's Talibanic rendition, Islam is essentially just a pretext for his pathological cruelty. Honor in this novel is anchored fundamentally in a patrilinear social system; it is a value passed on from father to son, and to join in it one must become, apparently, a father or father figure to other young men.

3. CONCLUSION :

The Kite Runner maps the journey of the Amir, the narrator. The story takes place in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States from 1975 to 2003. *The Kite Runner* leaves one feeling, a terrible Sadness for the Afghan people. Afghans have suffered at the hands of foreign invaders and their own people throughout the history of Afghanistan and particularly in the past 30 years. In *The Kite Runner*, Khalid Hosseini brilliantly tells their story within a story. The Cold War between the U.S.A. and the former Soviet Union, and the rule of Taliban brought death and utter destruction to the country. Over 5 million Afghans abandoned their homes and went into exile in other countries. Close to 1.5 million lost their lives. *The Kite Runner* explores the impacts of the Cold War, the Soviet invasion, the Taliban rule, refugee issue, heterogeneity of Afghan Society, tribal tradition, religious extremism and cultural clashes.

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